EQUIPPING LEADERS: CULTIVATING ENGAGEMENT, DISCIPLESHIP AND CONNECTION IN YOUTH MINISTRY

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

DEDICATION viii

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER

1. MINISTRY FOCUS 5
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS 24
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS 45
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS 65
5. INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS 84
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS 104

BIBLIOGRAPHY 133

ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING LEADERS: CULTIVATING ENGAGEMENT,
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by
Richard Boone, IV
United Theological Seminary, 2025

Mentors

Lance D. Watson, DMin
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The context of this project is Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. The desire is to effectively build youth disciples. If the Youth Ministry leaders at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church will become equipped and trained to engage youth, then the youth will become effective disciples and will remain connected to the youth ministry. I will use various methodological instruments to test the hypothesis of this project including interviews, pre- and post-surveys, and journaling. This research is qualitative. The goal is to understand the depth and context of human experiences rather than focusing on numbers or statistics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my Pastor and mentor, Rev. Dr. Marcus D. Cosby, Sr. I must say “thank you” for always believing in me. I have grown so much just by watching you. It has been a huge inspiration to see you operate in your calling with style, grace, and integrity. You show us every day that excellence is the standard and not the goal. You have made a major impact on my life, and I am a better person, Christian, and preacher by knowing you. You embody what a true man of God should be. I truly thank God for blessing my life with our connection and the time you have taken to invest in me.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation to my mentors Rev. Dr. William Curtis, and Rev. Dr. Lance Watson. I accredit my success to your unwavering support and encouragement. You both have challenged me to push through every semester, paper and beyond my doubts in my ability to arrive at the finish line of this Doctor of Ministry program. I am made better because God allowed me to experience their wisdom and profound insight. You all encouraged me to dig deeper and never fear the truth. I have experienced so much growth while in the cohort, a time I will always cherish.

I extend my deepest gratitude to my brothers who started this program and the Curtis/Watson cohort with me: Rev. Justin Hunt, Rev. Adrian Davis, Rev. George Fleurimond, and Rev. Stephen Goldsmith. You all have made an impact on my life.

Being a part of this brotherhood has motivated me never to quit and press through. It encouraged my determination beyond the doctoral program. They would not let me get distracted. Instead, they reminded me of the purpose and potential. They encouraged me to celebrate my wins and never take this process for granted. My appreciation will always run deep. They are my brothers forever.

Special thanks, recognition, and appreciation to some of the marvelous people I work with at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. Mrs. Kim Washington, Rev. Dr. Alexander Johnson, Rev. Janella Pyles, Rev. Dr. Barbara Williams, Rev. David M. Roberts, Rev. Ranyne Johnson, Rev. Dr. Jacques Denkins, Rev. David Moore, Andrea Tucker, Enda Cosby, Rev. Joseph Earle, Minister Leon Lewis, Andre Williams, Paulette Frederick, Bruce Everett, Agnes Johnson and Rev. Dr, Attuquayefio. I would simply like to say, "Thank You." Your belief in me has been an endless source of strength, and I thank God our paths have crossed. In addition to these amazing people, I must also acknowledge the youth I serve at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. My youth brings me so much joy, and my life has been deeply enriched by their presence.

To my entire family, friends, and support system, I must say thank you for the unending encouragement. I am beyond grateful for your prayers, phone calls, text messages, kind words, and love. These things were the fuel to push me forward when I wanted to quit. You reminded me that the journey ahead holds more weight than my moments of fear and doubt. You reminded me that my goal to finish strong was never mine to do alone. You reminded constantly of the plans God had for me and the predestinated win he already set in motion for me. You provided a safe space of love, transparency, care, and unlimited support. You are all invaluable. I will never forget all

you have contributed to my life. I hope that I am making you proud and will forever strive to pour back into you all what you have selflessly poured into me. I am abundantly grateful and wholeheartedly indebted. My admiration and love for you all goes beyond words.

DEDICATION

As a child, I hated school. I did not believe I was smart enough to thrive in education, so I worked hard to play sports because I figured I could make a career that would make others proud. However, the Lord had other plans, and because God knew the impact I would make, God shifted the trajectory of my life. God revealed to me that I am smart and I have what it takes to make a difference in the world. I would not be anything without the Lord. This entire doctoral work is dedicated to God so that God can get the glory out of my life and this doctoral work.

I must dedicate this work to my wife, who has been my biggest supporter from the beginning. Her unwavering support has helped me not to give up on this journey. I love her so much, and my life has been extremely blessed since our first date, filled with laughter, joy, and breakfast. I am eternally grateful to God for our beautiful journey together.

I also want to dedicate this to Richard A. Boone, III, Regina Boone, my parents, and the best sisters in the world, Rashanda, Rachel, and Rakiya. My family has been a constant source of strength, love, hope, and inspiration. My life has been blessed because of them, and I am proud to be a son and brother.

Finally, I dedicate this Doctoral Degree to my late grandparents, Dr. Willie A. Davis, Sr., and Bonita Hill. I miss them so much and promised myself I would never give

up. Their death during this program left me wanting to quit. However, the wisdom they instilled in me pushed me to press on and to keep the legacy going.

INTRODUCTION

It was my last year of seminary when my best friend Keenen Brinson and I had a conversation about our future as preachers. We always knew we were equipped to serve in the black church, but both agreed that we were not called to lead youth ministry. Fast forward two years later, we were both called to Houston, Texas, to be youth pastors. While we were mapping out our paths, God was constructing God's route for us. The road first started in October 2020. I truly feel like the pandemic changed the trajectory of my ministry. When I started serving at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, the COVID numbers were escalating, and everything seemed very uncertain. Our church was virtual, including my Bible Study with the youth. The pandemic limited our engagement, discipleship, and connection within the youth ministry. However, as we began to meet in person, the youth ministry quickly grew in numbers. Although numbers were growing, so was my concern that there was a disconnect between the youth and youth leaders. We were having "church," but the youth were disengaged and disconnected. Struggling with this reality, it was hard to disciple the youth. After having multiple conversations with my youth, they addressed the lack of safe space, which consequently made it hard for them to remain engaged and connected. Their transparency gave birth to the idea of exploring this topic.

This doctoral thesis and project are entrenched in the belief that solid foundations require solid relationships. It became clear to me that if the youth have a safe space in the

church, they will remain engaged and connected and ultimately become disciples. This work examines the need for a safe space in the church for the youth. The youth had gotten used to living in isolation, which is the opposite of what the church should do. The work is titled “Equipping Leaders: Cultivating Engagement, Discipleship and Connection in Youth Ministry.”

Chapter One is the Ministry Focus, and it highlights aspects of my spiritual journey, childhood, faith formation, higher education, calling to ministry, and professional development. This chapter provides a high-level look into my journey as a youth minister at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. It also focuses on steps of preparation that lead to living on purpose. I found it important to shed more light on the cultivation process that helped develop my skills as a leader. It also outlines the value I found in listening to the people I am leading and learning alongside those individuals.

Chapter Two is the biblical foundation, and it focuses on 2 Timothy chapter three in its entirety. We explore this scripture through exegesis on Paul and his relationship with Timothy. This chapter addresses how Timothy was connected to Paul. We see that through their connection and engagement, Paul disciple Timothy. Paul wanted Timothy to remain faithful and urged him to be godly amid an ungodly world. Paul poured into Timothy, and Timothy was receptive to Paul's teachings. This further proves that relationship matters and yields progression.

Chapter Three is the historical foundation, and it examines the life of Robert Raikes and his love for youth. This chapter shares his experience with the youth and his commitment to creating a safe space for them. The youth needed spaces where they could express their thoughts, opinions, talents, and gifts without comparison to others in the

ministry. Raikes provided space for them to be themselves freely. In return, he saw the youth open themselves to the resources around them and strive for a stronger connection with God. He found the more time he invested in the people he led, the more they wanted to invest their time in learning and growing.

Chapter Four is the theological foundation, and it explores the vitality of communitarian theology. Community is key for the youth post-pandemic, and this chapter explains the communal aspect of religious life and the importance of community. Knowing that you are not alone can truly make a difference in how people view the value of relationships. The community encourages teamwork, enhances collective abilities to achieve, and embodies the true spirit of agape love. How we interact with each other can shape how we see God in each other's lives.

Chapter Five is the interdisciplinary foundation, and it examines the difference that lies between this generation's style of learning versus the previous generations before them. This chapter talked about the difference between the traditional classroom method, where the teacher is the expert and lectures to the students. However, it seems like the new generation finds more value in an engagement model where teachers create a safe space for the youth to engage, connect, and interact with one another. This allows students to develop a true love for learning and take a sincere interest in what they are being taught. This ultimately forms a genuine connection between students and instructors.

Chapter Six is the project analysis, which offers an overview of this doctoral project. This chapter provides the methodology of project design and implementation. It also gives data collection and provides a credible summary of learning for this project. I

can put metrics behind my experiences with the people I am leading. These metrics monitor the highs and lows of engagement, which gives way to methods of improvement. It also allowed us to display sentiments of concern for our youth and open the door for transparent discussion. The youth felt heard, and our efforts to support them were put into action. These discussions allowed us to learn the efficiency of our current agenda and how to create room for more innovation within the ministry. I think this created a positive future for the ministry, community, and the Kingdom of God overall.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

There is quote by Woody Allen that says, "If you want to make God laugh, tell God about your plans."[1] I would have never thought that I would be pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree. To be honest, I struggled graduating from high school. However, God called me to pastor, lead, and preach the gospel and the time is now to get over my fear and chase after another degree for development and ministry purposes.

Jeremiah 29:11 New Revised Standard Version says, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."[2] Proverbs 19:21 says, the human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will be established. In 2015, God called me to preach but I was shocked because I believed my purpose was to play Major League Baseball. During my senior year in college, my quad in my leg was pulled and therefore, my baseball career ended. I heard God call me to preach but I did not think I was smart enough or talked well enough to preach. However, after speaking with my father who was my pastor at the time, I preached my first sermon on October 11, 2015. Even after preaching my

[1] Woody Allen, "If You Want to Make God Laugh, Tell Him," Brainy Quote, https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/woody_allen_136686.

[2] All biblical citations will be from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, Jeremiah 29:11.

first sermon, I was still in shock that God would call me. I was not confident in my ability to speak, comprehend, or do what I watched my dad do for years. However, I said, “yes” despite my flaws. While being an associate minister at my dad’s church, I learned a lot and received the foundation I needed to grow spiritually and as a preacher. I enjoyed sitting and watching my dad. I had the privilege to watch my dad practice what he preached because I was blessed to have him as my dad, pastor, and father in the ministry. However, after a while, I was not growing at his church anymore. I was looking for more and after three years, I left home and my church looking for the place that would stretch me spiritually and as a preacher.

In 2018, my life changed in Atlanta, Georgia when I enrolled at the Interdenominational Theological Center to pursue a Master of Divinity degree. I was the only student who did not know anything about seminary before enrolling. A mentor suggested I go to seminary and the next day I enrolled and months later I was pursuing a degree and really did not understand why. Interdenominational Theological center helped me understand God, community, and the Bible for myself. My ministry and preaching changed at the Bethany Baptist Church in Atlanta Georgia. My seminary pastor, Dr. Craig White gave me the opportunity to be the leader over the youth and young Adults. We did not have many young people, but my job was to create programming for the youth to experience God in their own way. I did not feel called to be a youth pastor because I was used to preaching to the senior saints.

Preaching and teaching to the youth made me insecure about preaching because they did not know the cliches I was teaching. I hated to preach to youth because they did not shout amen and I could not whoop at the end of my sermons. Dr. White wanted me to

be over the youth to help them grow spiritually and to help me get out of my comfort zone. At the time, I assumed my seminary Pastor only wanted me to help the youth because I was young, but he wanted me to embrace leading the next generation. My time at Bethany stretched me and gave me what I was missing at my dad's church.

In 2019, I was blessed to be chosen for a summer internship at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church exposed me to ministry on a different level. Dr. Marcus D. Cosby was very strategic with developing the intern preachers and preparing us for what God was calling us to do. Honestly, Wheeler taught me how much I did not know about ministry. The churches I came from had a membership of seventy-five people. Wheeler Avenue, at the time of my internship, was a congregation of about 17,000 members (about the seating capacity of Madison Square Garden) and Dr. Cosby could not do the work by himself. Watching my dad and Dr. White playing every position to keep making this vision come alive was slowly burning them out. Before interning, I assumed the pastor was supposed to do everything, but Wheeler taught me that to survive and thrive in ministry, the pastor needs a team that will help the vision from God come to pass. Interning at Wheeler changed my perspective on ministry and youth ministry.

Context

Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, respectfully known as "The Avenue" is in the heart of Third Ward, Houston Texas. The Church's campus is located at 3826 Wheeler Avenue Houston, Texas 77004. Wheeler Avenue is a worshiping, witnessing, and welcoming congregation. The mission of this great church is to be devoted to a spirit of

excellence in the praise of the Almighty God through Jesus Christ. This guiding principle are carried out through the Christian Education of children, youth, and adults for the maturation in the faith, and worldwide ministry for the promotion of peace and justice in every aspect of life. To this end, all people will be touched and transformed by the liberating power of God's Holy Spirit. In March of 1962, the Reverend William Alexander Lawson and thirteen faithful people known as charter members established a church.[3]

In 1955, Reverend Lawson and his wife moved to Houston, Texas so that he could serve as the Baptist Student Union Director at Texas Southern University. This was significant because this happened when the state university was not allowed to have religious programs. While working with the students, several people complained to Pastor Lawson about churches not existing near the school where Black people could worship. Although this was during the Civil Rights Movement and racial tension was between Blacks and Whites in the south, Pastor Lawson and the thirteen founding members, assembled in the Baptist Student Union at Texas Southern University and started a church, which at the time was called Riverside Baptist Church.

The Riverside Baptist Church was named after the third ward neighborhood where Pastor Lawson and his family lived. Shortly after starting the church, Pastor Lawson was looking to the right person to pastor the Riverside Baptist Church, but God had other plans. The Riverside Baptist Church began to grow, and Pastor Lawson was faced with a hard decision. He knew he could not devote all his time to the church while also working with the university. After much consideration, he decided to remain the

[3] Debbie Z. Harwell, "The City of Houston," Houston History Magazine, http://houstonhistorymagazine.

Leader of the Church. He wanted to commit himself to building and expanding the church.

As a result of Pastor Lawson's decision to leave the University, Riverside Baptist Church would eventually have to find a new building. The Baptist Student Union at the university of Houston moved to a new building and by the grace of God, Pastor Lawson along with all thirty members were able to buy and move to a new building on 3826-Wheeler Street. Then birth the new name that reigns true today, Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church is a safe place, aiming to help black students and the black community during the Civil Rights Movement. Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church fought against the injustice in Houston, Texas while promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Church in Third Ward called Wheeler looked out for the least, last, and left out and ministered to the total person during the segregation and is still committed to the same mission.

In 1985, Wheeler Avenue began to grow exponentially. Pastor Lawson built their new sanctuary on the same campus as the little white building. Eventually this building became green after a while. As the church kept growing, Wheeler Avenue was able to build a sanctuary for worship, a shipping and receiving facility, and the William A. Lawson Christian Life Center and Community Life Center, during the forty-first church anniversary. After forty-two years of pastoring and serving the Wheeler Avenue Church, Pastor Lawson passed the torch to the Reverend Marcus D. Cosby in 2004.[4]

Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church has a total membership of 13,835 as of August of 2022. There are 7% at the age of eighteen and under and 20% of between the ages of

[4] Marcus Cosby, "Wheeler Chronicles," Wheeler Baptist Church, https://wheelerbc.org/.

nineteen to twenty-nine. There are 13% of the congregation who are fifty to fifty-nine years of age. Fifteen percent of the members are between the ages of forty to forty-nine. Ten percent of the membership fall in the age bracket of sixty to sixty-nine. Nine percent of the membership is between the ages of seventy to 106. Wheeler Avenue's congregation consists of about 63% of singles, 34% of married couples, 2% of those who are divorced, and 1% who are widowed. As of August, and I will be able to provide more updates 35 % of males make up Wheeler Avenue and 65% are females.[5]

Wheeler Avenue is a growing Church under the leadership of Dr. Marcus D. Cosby. Dr. Cosby has been at Wheeler for a total of twenty-four years; six years as associate pastor and eighteen years as the senior pastor. The Avenue believes in ministering to the total person and loving the community. Wheeler has been around for sixty years and has grown from thirteen to over 13,000 members, with over seventy ministries. Wheeler represents the entire Greater Third Ward community educationally, spiritually, racially, economically, and psychologically. In doing so, Wheeler Avenue is intentionally intergenerational with an intergenerational pastoral staff. The staff ministers from each demographic. We have a youth and college minister, a young adult minister, minister to the seniors, and many more influential ministries. We all fall under the great leadership of our executive pastor. We take mental health seriously and fully invested in the wellbeing of each employee and member. From our full-time mental health support resources to our additional wellness incentives, we are committed to the mental, spiritual, and physical upkeep of our people.

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[5] Marcus Cosby, "Wheeler Chronicles," Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church Documents, https://wheelerbc.org/.

Wheeler Avenue believes in an all-powerful, all-knowing Creator-God who fashioned God's universe, probably in the image of God's own heavenly realm. Wheeler believes God then placed humans, made in God's image in this very good universe to manage it for God. Wheeler believes that God, being omniscient, anticipated a rebellion and formed a plan to redeem humankind. This great plan would evolve through a chosen servant (Abraham), a chosen nation (Israel), a body of divine law, a series of divinely controlled tribulations, a message proclaimed by chosen prophets, and a personal visit to the earth by God's own Son through death and resurrection.

Wheeler believes that God requires a total stewardship. This includes all gifts, treasures, and time. We were placed here to worship God and an effective influence for others to join God's holy work. Total stewardship requires giving of oneself. It calls all those committed to personal piety and social action. It is our firm belief that God wants to use people in sanctuary and in marketplace to preach conversion and civic justice. God is calling us as church members, professionals, students, homemakers, and total servants to bring a total message to the total human condition. Wheeler believes that they are privileged to be partners with God in the redeeming of the damaged human race and the bruised universe.

Wheeler in the Pandemic

Wheeler was forced to shut down and conduct only one virtual pre-recorded worship service every Friday, which was presented on Sunday mornings." From March 2020 to August 2020, the viewers went up from 482,563 to 746,186."[6] The significant

[6] Marcus Cosby, "Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church," https://wheelerbc.org/.

growth on social media proved that the pandemic did not stop people from joining “The Avenue.” Four hundred and fifty-eight people joined during our campus closure. During the pandemic community the “Wheeler Wherever” community birthed. This special community is made up of people who joined the church during the pandemic, in state and out of state. The ministry continued to go forth during the pandemic with the start of Tuesday’s Touch with Dr. Cosby and Mental Health Moments with Dr. Barbara Williams.

The youth ministry continued to meet every week on zoom. Due to the decline in attendance, it was discovered that online was not the most effective option. The pandemic was hard for the younger members all around. Youth, who typically made up 7% of the congregation, declined to 3% of the congregation. The youth ministry did not see growth until March 2022. In October of 2021, Wheeler Avenue went back to in-person worship with registration, masks, and 50% of capacity with leaders' worship for three weeks. In November, the rest of the congregation attended worship with masks and registration mandatory. Although the pandemic shut everything down, Wheeler managed to continue building the Cathedral and Christian Education Center. The doors were officially open for worship in October 2022. The cathedral can hold almost 3,000 people with capacity to hold overflow, weddings, and funerals.

Contextual Analysis

During the contextual analysis, there were some problems I noticed regarding youth ministry. Since moving into the Christian Education Complex, Wheeler has added two new services to the Sunday schedule: Children’s Church and Youth Church. These

two ministries ensure the Christian Education and spiritual development for the kids every single week. Held every Sunday during the 11:30 a.m. service, Children's Church program offers children (ages three through fifth grade) an opportunity to worship in an environment designed specifically for them. The purpose of the Youth Ministry is to minister to the spiritual, educational, and recreational needs of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church's high school students. This ministry, also known as "The W.A.Y.," meets every week and sees over 200 kids. Every first and third Sunday, The W.A.Y. has Bible and Breakfast.

Bible and Breakfast is a time set aside for Bible study and fellowship. This is a time to ensure that youth can be physically and spiritually fed. Every second and fourth Sunday is Youth Church at 11:30 a.m. Youth Church is a worship experience for the youth by the youth to ensure young people worship God in their own way. Wheeler has been around since 1962 and 2022 is the first time to have 200 kids in attendance at Youth Church. However, for Wheeler to be a 13,000-member church, the question becomes where are the rest of the Youth? Wheeler Avenue is in dire need of a parent/guardian training to teach the importance of why youth must attend church and have their own personal experience. Also, Parents are to disciple their children and care about their Christian Education just as much as their secular education for young people to grow spiritually. Wheeler Avenue's goal is to be intentionally intergenerational.

The "Avenue" does well with including the youth. However, the youth at Wheeler are accustomed to the "Wheeler way" instead of embracing an authentic experience. In essence, the "Wheeler way" shapes the youth to copy the adults. Being intentionally intergenerational is including the young people and giving them the right to freely

worship God in their own way and not just in their own space but in the main worship service. Intentional Intergenerational for Wheeler Avenue is highlighting youth on annual programs such as youth revival, Dr. Martin Luther King Day, Scholarship Day, Black History Month, and the Christmas play. There is a difference between including the youth and allowing them to consistently be involved regularly and to do more than read a scripture and pray.

During the pandemic, the youth did not have any choice but to stay connected online. Zoom was not sufficient to captivate the attention of the youth. Since church was online, most youth did not worship. The pandemic church has made post-pandemic church hard for the youth to be involved on their own.

Personal Experience

Born in the windy city of Chicago, Illinois, where I resided in the tiny suburb of Dolton. I have the fondest memories of living in that three-bedroom home with my family of six. You would think the lack of space would make us feel crowded, but I believe it made us closer. I can still recall the laughter of family dinners, the silly family disagreements, and the fun times I had with my friends on the block. Although Michigan Street was only a six-block radius, it seemed like our whole world at that time. I spent sixteen years there before moving to Aberdeen, Mississippi, and starting new chapters of life.

If I could describe my life in one word, it would be evolving! Although I was raised in a stable environment and my path at times seemed mapped out for me, I feel like there is so much I have yet to learn and discover about who I am. To be honest, I did not

experience a traumatic upbringing. I am a product of a two-parent household, love and encouragement, godly living and service, and family prayer. However, even with all those things, I still believe that my sheltered childhood has caused me to lack exposure to reality. There were subjects of conversation that were extremely taboo in my house. This includes sex, drugs, drinking, and even intimacy. Although I know it was for my protection, I found myself stumbling through life, trying to iron out things in those areas. I believe this has affected my views on relationships, and proper communication. However, I love my family so much and I realize all my life I have been surrounded by family, church family, and a community that has made me who I am today. God has provided many safe havens in my life. My family, as I mentioned earlier, is a safe haven. However, the church became a very close second. I remember forming and sustaining so many life-changing friendships in the church. As always, all the kids were running around having fun after church. I am unsure if any of us knew how much Jesus would mean to us at the time, but we knew we were experiencing church together. The church was always a place of love and learning for me.

My life in Chicago was consumed with family, sports, and church. I started playing baseball and football when I was around five or six. I loved sports and indulged in them because I wanted to be good at something. I strived to achieve greatness within myself. Even as a young child, I was determined to beat the odds that stigmatized a young black man in America. This taught me to be outgoing. Coaches became role models, and teammates became brothers. The first coach that stood out to me was Cleo James. He taught me that sometimes to be great, you must step out of what is familiar. He gave me my first opportunity to start when he insisted, I tried out for center and nose

tackle. Center? Nose Tackle? I was a third string full back, and he wanted me to give up scoring touchdowns to protect the quarterback and running back and help them score touchdowns. This was unfamiliar territory, and despite initial hesitancy, I took a chance. Due to stepping out of my comfort zone, I became one of the best linemen in my league. I still carry that with me today and appreciate coach James for switching my position. Being a lineman made me realize that the position I wanted was great, but the position I needed to be in gave me a better purpose in that season. In this, I learned that you do not need to get all the credit to be adequate. It taught me that I am valuable and although I may not be in the spotlight, what I bring to the table helps others shine at what they do.

Sports taught me a lot about human interaction. While playing sports, I met my first childhood friend, Corey. Corey stayed two blocks from my house, and it didn't take long for our friendship to turn into a brotherhood. Corey and I did everything together. Corey's family structure was much different than my family structure. He was the product of a single household. He lived with his mother, who took me in as her son, and an older brother who looked out for us, although he was in a gang. I loved hanging around Corey and his older brother. It was like a completely different world sometimes. The reality my parents hid from me was exposed when I was with them. I truly learned how to love, accept, respect, and associate with people from different backgrounds.

Another personal experience I can remember is being homeless. My first few weeks at the ITC were uncomfortable. I assumed I was enrolling into "Jesus" school. On my first day of class, my professor threw the Bible in the trash and told us that we were in the wrong place if we were looking for a Sunday school class. I initially hated ITC because I felt my classmates and professors did not respect God and were too smart for

their good. However, if I was being honest with myself, I did not feel like I was smart enough to keep up with my classmates. I fell into depression while living in Atlanta because I had no money and was behind on my bills. I could not focus, and I was not feeling like school anymore, so I quit! I wrestled with God because I did not understand why God would call me to a place but not provide for me while being there. I could not sleep for weeks, and ITC was on my mind daily. Finally, in the spirit of obedience, I packed my clothes, loaded up my car, and drove back to Atlanta. After begging my school for another chance and being homeless for three weeks, ITC gave me another chance. I was committed to finishing strong! I met lifelong friends at ITC, such as Brandon Lewis Malone, Keenen Brinson, Jocteal Frierson, Jake Sanders, Joseph Parks, and others. These brothers impacted my life by pushing me to have confidence in myself.

Some professors shaped me to be who I am today. Drs. Willie Godman, Joseph Evans, Riggins Earl, Jacqulyn Grant, Antonio Proctor, Daniel Black, and others. These specific names helped me to become the thinker I am today. ITC is where I met my Seminary Pastor, Dr. Craig White. Dr. White was another father to me. I needed my dad while in Seminary, but he lived six hours away. However, Dr. White treated me as if I was his biological son and made me feel like my life and ministry mattered. Dr. White allowed me to serve and grow spiritually under his leadership. Whenever I overthink, these professors would encourage me to trust my thoughts. My experience at the ITC helped me to appreciate who I was and what I could bring to the table.

Before I graduated from ITC, I was allowed to intern at the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, where I was exposed to another level of ministry at Wheeler. Wheeler changed my life. Dr. Cosby and his staff challenged me to be excellent in ministry. My

internship boosted my confidence in what God could do through me. I felt childhood insecurities taking a back seat to new thoughts, newly restored hope, and new ways of innovation. Dr. Cosby is also like a father to me. He is patient and always tells me that I add value to the kingdom. I am grateful that God knows how to put all the pieces together.

Lastly, the pandemic negatively affected my mind. I was afraid that police would kill me because of what happened to the black community. I also find myself being mentally distracted and distraught by the social climate we have been in, with the issues of racial injustice (the deaths of George Floyd, Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, and many more). My heart mourned for them, and my mind told me I could be them. The thoughts of dying to haunt me daily. Especially during the season of COVID-19. As the numbers continued to rise, so did my blood pressure. Just when I thought I would lose it, God reminded me of the safety provided by my family, friends, and my overall purpose. All these things reflected God's love for me. There was reassurance that I shall live!

Educational Experience

My educational experience came with some hardships. Growing up sheltered has made me insecure about not knowing certain things. When I was in school, I refused to read out loud, and when my teachers would ask me to read or write on the board, I would ignore them and get in trouble so I would not have to honor their requests. I struggled with the thought of my friends and classmates knowing that I was struggling academically. Honestly, getting suspended from school seemed better than being humiliated in front of my peers. My mom tried her best to help me do my homework and

teach me essential fundamentals, but nothing seemed to work. My insecurities caused me to wonder about my existence. I often wrestled with the thought and asked, "why God allowed me to be "dumb!" After a while, I stopped blaming God and started accusing my mom. At one point in my life, the resentment became so consuming that it affected my relationships with my sisters. My mom used to always congratulate them for making the honor roll. My mom celebrating my sisters made me so angry because no matter how hard I tried to make good grades, I could not make higher than a C-. My insecurities became deeply rooted in envy. Jealousy became more significant than the admiration I had for my sisters.

While living in Chicago, I attended Harriet Tubman Elementary School and Roosevelt Junior High School and Thornton High School. I loved my school because I had teachers that would help me learn at my pace. As I look over my life, I find it amazing how God uses obstacles to reaffirm his power in our lives. I have so many stories, but I will start with High School. In 2008, my family and I moved to Mississippi, and I did not have teachers to spend personal time with me to help me comprehend my work. I attended Aberdeen High School and because I was an athlete, my teachers passed me so I could be eligible for football and baseball season.

After graduating high school and receiving my high school diploma, I attended Rust College on a baseball scholarship, and I majored in mass communication. Before I was in ministry, I was interested in broadcast and journalism. My school gave me the opportunity to create my own radio show and anchor for the Rust College news and sports. My goal was to play professional baseball, but my backup plan was to host my own show on ESPN called opinionated. I was called to preach my senior year at Rust

College, and I was active in church. I began a college chapel service with my friend and created a chapel choi called the anointed vessels. We worshipped every Wednesday night and hosted multiple events.

Following undergrad, I attended the Interdenominational Theological Center to pursue my Master of Divinity and receiving MDiv in 2021. It was at the "ITC," I learned more about God and my community. Interdenominational Theological Center opened my eyes to Liberation Theology and preaching the gospel to liberate and not condemn. My master's program has shaped me into a thinker and lover of the Bible.

Professional Experience

Professionally, I worked for two colleges, a journalism company, and a church. For a short season, I worked at Rust College as a freshman housing director. I enjoyed working with the students to empower, encourage, and enlighten the students on building community with each other. Working at Rust College did not feel like a job although it was my first professional job. Rust College was my alma mater. I learned and experienced so much as a student; and it was an honor to give back to my school by pouring into the next generation of leaders. After a few months of working as the housing director, I was promoted to assistant baseball coach. I was a four-year starter in college and my job was to coach and help guys appreciate the game of baseball and the importance of being a student athlete. Also, I was tasked with another challenge as housing director and assistant baseball coach. The next role I was assigned to was ensuring the college students attended chapel service every Wednesday night. Between the chaplain and I, we preached and planned services and events that would captivate the

students. We had events such as weekly revivals, Sunday's best college addition, talent shows, open mic night, speed dating, Bible studies, prayer meetings, community service projects, gospel concerts, fitness days, and chapel dinners. The purpose of the events was to keep the students busy and in the community as a family.

My second professional job was working in Chicago at the *Chicago Tribune*. After my season was up in Mississippi working at the college, I moved back home to Chicago to work for *The Chicago Tribune* as call reprehensive. I did not really enjoy the job because it required answering the phone for people who wanted obituaries in the newspaper. My assignment there was to talk calmly to hurt people and to make sure whatever they needed I was able to provide. *The Chicago Tribune* was known for advertisements in the newspaper, and I was able to help bring peace to grieving families.

Once I left Chicago, I received a job at Talladega College as a Residential Hall Director and Activities Director. The position was designed to mentor upper class students and to help bring fun activities to campus life. During my time at Talladega College, I also started a chapel service for the students and a chapel praise team. As a preacher and Christian, I wanted the students to develop their own relationship with God. The chapel service grew from twenty to about 150 in the first few months. Shortly after working for Talladega, I received the call to work for Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church as the Youth and College minister.

Spiritual Analysis

After giving much thought to my spiritual autobiography, I discovered that having support from my family is what made me who I am today. My whole life my family has

supported, encouraged, empowered, and even constructively criticized me only to help me stay on the right track. I am proud to have the family and community that surrounded me because they saw my potential even when I could not see it for myself. Because of my family's and community's support, I am an educated black male who strives to help youth and young adults appreciate who they are in Christ and the community. When I was growing up as a youth, I fell in love with Jesus because my parents discipled me outside of Sunday morning. My mom read Bible stories with me, and because of my parents making sure I went to church; I began to develop a personal relationship with Jesus. However, I did not have a youth pastor to help me learn church for myself. I was always with the adults and thought church was supposed to be a certain way instead of taking God outside of the box to experience the Lord on my level. It took me a long time to have an encounter with God, I was more in love with the traditional Church than God. Although my community supported me and made sure I was worshipping on Sunday, I realized having a space for worship with kids my age would have helped me love and learn about God. Also, I would be excited to worship with the adults and learn from each other instead of becoming skilled at mimicking my elders. I did not have a balance and therefore I was searching for the perfect church after I graduated high school.

I discovered that my identity was tied to the elders in my community. I had people pushing me to be great but never encouraging me to be myself. Part of my identity was rooted in who I was taught to be. However, the elders had a problem with who I was because it was the opposite of who they thought I should be. I wish I had bold young leaders to give me a different perspective about church and Christianity and to teach me Why I should be involved in ministry outside of youth ministry. I was ashamed of

inviting my friends to church because church seemed like a place for “older” people. My parents and community played a positive part in my spiritual growth but also the lack of spiritual youth leaders played a big part in my spiritual growth being stagnant.

To that end, I hypothesize that if more churches strive to build succession from the pulpit to the pew to integrate development, and mature adolescence to adulthood for congregational ministry, then the youth will be excited to grow to the next level of ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die," says Dietrich Bonhoeffer.[1] There are different kinds of dying, it is true, but the essence of discipleship is contained in those words.[2] Discipleship is essential for those who have decided to follow Jesus Christ. Being a certain age is not a prerequisite to becoming a disciple of Jesus. As a matter of fact, in Matthew 28:19-20 when Jesus said to go and make disciples of all nations, Jesus did not limit being a disciple and discipleship to only adulthood but commanded his disciples to baptize and teach "them." The "Them" includes not only adults but adolescents. "The Christian community must rethink our efforts to make disciples."[3] "Disciples cannot be mass-produced. Disciples are handmade, one relationship at a time."[4] "Discipleship is marked out as genuine by perseverance in suffering."[5]

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone Rockefeller Center, 1939), 99.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 99.

[3] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me* (Grand Rapid, MI: Bakers Books, 2011), 13.

[4] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 13.

[5] Robert W. Wall and Richard B. Steele, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus: The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 260.

Part of discipleship-making is building relationships by understanding the individual(s) that are in the process of becoming a disciple. In the New Testament, Jesus built relationships with the twelve disciples he had chosen to follow him. Building a discipleship model for adults may seem easy to do. However, the question becomes how do we build a discipleship model for middle adolescence? Middle adolescents are ages of fifteen to eighteen. The ages for Youth Ministry are from twelve to eighteen, which is sixth grade to high school also known as middle school and high school. However, according to Iowa 4-H volunteers, there is a big difference mentally between twelve- to fourteen-year-olds who are considered early adolescents and fifteen- to eighteen-year-olds who are middle adolescents.

Iowa 4-H articles suggest that early adolescents are concerned about physical development, being liked by friends, social, graces, and good grooming (even if they don't like to admit it.) They also desire a sense of independence while still wanting help from their parents. Twelve to fourteen-year-olds are interested in activities involving boys and girls and gain skills in social relations with peers and adults. In other words, Early Adolescence is searching for their community. Making disciples and creating a model for early adolescents includes providing a sacred space for the early adolescents to call their own.

However, Iowa 4-H suggests Middle Adolescents have high social needs and desires. Middle Adolescents want and need a strong voice in planning their programs. They need freedom from parental control to make decisions, want adult leadership roles, and have a strong desire for status in peer group. Middle Adolescents are beginning to know themselves as individuals, develop community consciousness, need life planning

guidance, consider leaving home for college, employment, and marriage, and their philosophy has begun to emerge. Many eighteen-year-olds will leave the community for employment, and many who go to college will not return to their present communities after graduation. When thinking about the church and an effective discipleship model, one cannot help but think about the Middle Adolescents who became disengaged in church, eventually left, returned later, or never return at all after high school graduation.

When strategically creating a discipleship model for adults, building a discipleship model specifically for Middle Adolescents is important. Senior Pastors, Youth leaders, and most definitely parents must take the time to build relationships with the youth. Middle Adolescence must understand how important remembering what they have been taught from childhood, so they will not forget when they move to adulthood. Such is the case in 2 Timothy 3:10-17, Paul is writing to Timothy reminding him how important it is to keep his faith in God and keep following Christ despite the distractions in the world. Paul reminded Timothy of his godly examples in his life and charged Timothy to go back and remember those who not only taught Timothy about faith but were living examples of those who kept the faith. "Paul lived his life with the clock ticking in the background, and he wants Timothy to do the same."[6]

"Paul's own situation is not encouraging. He is in prison, probably in Rome (1:16-17). He has already made one defense from which he emerged only like one "snatched from the jaws of lion" (4:17). In contrast to his letters to Philemon and the Philippians, he expressed genuine hope of release. Paul here reveals no such expectations. He considers his life to be ending (4:6-7). He has no more hope for human

[6] Tom Wright, *Paul and Everyone* (Great Britain, UK: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 75.

vindication, only divine. In other words, he is grappling with both the feelings of abandonment and rejection from humanity. Second Timothy 3:10-17 will show how creating a discipleship model specifically for Middle Adolescence is essential.

History

Philip H. Towner, suggests in 2 Timothy chapter three, Paul is addressing Timothy, his son in the ministry, the godliness in the last days. First and Second Timothy and Titus are known as "the pastoral epistles. Timothy and Titus were establishing, and leading local churches and Paul wanted his sons in the ministry to understand how important it was to have a godly ministry despite the godlessness in what Paul considered the Last Days. "The essence of ungodliness comes from within."[7] Timothy was assigned to ministry in Ephesus. Ephesus was known for the practice of magic, sorcery, and soothsaying, practices which found room in most or all pagan religions.[8] Timothy was called to represent Christ in an area filled with idolatry. The life of Ephesus was as religiously complex as that of any other imperial Asian city. Emperor worship had come to the forefront after a long and complicated period of gestation throughout the Greek and Roman eras. Emperor worship had come to be a part of the city's identity as an imperial capital.

In Ephesus, during the Apostle Paul's day, the city was occupied by the Artemis cult and the cult itself was at the center of commercial activity in the city. Artemis, in Greek religion, is the goddess of wild animals. Artemis was worshipped as a goddess of

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[7] Knute Larson, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 285.

[8] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 30.

fertility and purity. Paul had a thriving ministry. For about three years, Paul's ministry was marked by the works of the Holy Spirit with great success. "Paul presents his conduct as an example of faithful service to God."[9] Some opposition arose surrounding the encounter of Paul's gospel and Artemis worship. Due to the opposition, a riot resulted in many against the Christian Movement. The church, which included Jews and Gentiles, represented an urgent threat to the well–being of Artemisia Ephesus. Consequently, this is the city where Timothy was called to do ministry.[10] Paul also wanted to address the false teachings of Ephesus. The Christian Church was up against Gnosticism. Gnostics worshipped more than one God, while Christians believed in serving and worshipping one God. The Apostle Paul wanted to keep Timothy from being discouraged due to false teachings among the Church. Paul warns Timothy of the distressing times in the last days. In 2 Timothy chapter three, Paul charges Timothy to stay the course and keep the faith despite the popularity of false teaching. Paul did not want Timothy to give up on the Gospel or allow the evil in Ephesus to dissuade him from standing in the faith.

Scholar Luke Timothy Johnson agrees that Paul decided to write the pastoral letter to his son in the ministry, Timothy. Timothy is addressed not only as a "beloved child" but above all as a servant of the Lord," as a teacher and preacher of the Gospel. Paul needed Timothy to understand that he was surrounded by false teachers. Much of 2 Timothy consists of polemic against false teachers but the polemic is not aimed directly

[9] Mark L. Bailey, "The Message of 2 Timothy," Dallas Theological Seminary, https://voice.dts.edu/article/the-message-of-2-timothy-mark-l-bailey/.

[10]Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 32.

at the false teachers who Paul refers to as the opponents but is used as a contrast to the positive ideal of the teacher toward which Timothy is to strive.[11]

The Apostle Paul does not simply present a model of virtue for Timothy's emulation, together with series of maxims saying, "do this but avoid this." Luke Timothy Johnson suggests that Paul gives Timothy a model of the steadfast teacher, together with a series of maxims, saying "teach this way and not that way." Second, Timothy gives instructions to Timothy contrasted to the manner of the false teachers, and Paul once more presented as a model of suffering. In verses ten through seventeen, Paul gives his son in the ministry specific instructions on how to keep the faith and stay focused on the assignment despite the persecution and suffering that Timothy would have to face because of his commitment to Christ and the ministry in Ephesus. Second Timothy is the most of Paul's letters according to Luke Timothy Johnson. Paul is striving to encourage Timothy although Paul's situation is not encouraging. Paul is in prison waiting to be executed for refusing to recant the name of Jesus. The Apostle hopes to be released but if not, he wants to make sure he writes to his mentee to empower him to keep working for Jesus. Paul's directions concerning such people are simple: "Stay away from people like that!" Above all, Timothy was not to get tangled up with these folks because of their depraved, deceptive, destructive ways, which are destined for a shameful expose.

Second Timothy 3:10-17 states:

> Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, and my suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived. But as for you,

[11] Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 35.

> continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:10-17).

Paul moves from writing and warning Timothy about godlessness and perversions in the last days to writing about his own life's examples and charges Timothy to follow the godly lifestyle and ministry. Paul gives Timothy a prescription in chapter 3:10-17. Paul diagnosed the disease and now suggests ways Timothy can prevent from being exposed to godlessness in the last days.

In verse ten, Paul reminds Timothy that he has observed Paul's teaching, conduct, aim in life, faith, patience, love, and steadfastness. The Apostle Paul believed Timothy had observed Paul's godly life and example enough to not only imitate Paul's life but to trust Paul enough to imitate his life. In other words, Timothy had personal knowledge because Paul spent time with Timothy. In the original translation, Paul used the word "follow." "You followed" is replaced by "you have followed" in an attempt to clarify the effect Paul's persecution had on Timothy.[12]

Timothy has been a disciple of Paul from the time of his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-5). Timothy followed Paul, not only as a companion on his journeys but as a child following a father. The word follow means "to walk at one's side, "or to imitate."[13] Timothy was a disciple of Paul and Paul followed Jesus. Disciples should be able to make disciples and the only example all disciples should follow is Jesus Christ.

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[12] William D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 500.

[13] George T. Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture Baker Academic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 176.

Paul was not just Timothy's father and teacher in the faith, but also as a model for subsequent generations.[14] Paul trained Timothy by building a relationship with his son in the ministry. Now, Paul is reminding him of the journey they were on together. If you train children in the right way, when old, they will not stray.

The word "conduct" in verse ten is how one leads one's life. Timothy was well trained because Paul lived a godly life right before Timothy's eyes. Paul calls Timothy to remember their time together. "But you followed my teaching, my life, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, and steadfastness."[15] Paul holds up his own life as an example for Timothy to emulate. Paul is not arrogant but a good mentor encouraging his son in the faith to be encouraged. Timothy was able to trust Paul's mentorship. There is a reminder of Timothy's spiritual heritage and the influences of the Old Testament and the gospel. Just as Paul calls Timothy to look forward and minister in Ephesus, so Paul has called someone else to remember their godly examples from the past and present. In verse ten, Paul lists nine items that Timothy learned from Paul's life. The first item Paul listed was his teaching. Paul reminded Timothy of his doctrine. The first item is important because Timothy needed to remain faithful to doctrine while living in fast teaching. In essence, Paul is making sure Timothy sticks with the truth. "Paul speaks of the false teachers in the future, he has previously referred to them in the present. He is most concerned about the moral degeneracy which sets in as a consequence of wrong teaching."[16]

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[14] Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 1080.

[15] Mounce, *Word Commentary Pastoral Epistles*, 521.

[16] Bible.Org, "Seventeen Identifying False Teachers (1 Timothy 6:3-5)," Bible.Org, https://bible.org/seriespage/17-identifying-false-teachers-1-timothy-63-5.

Timothy knows Paul's doctrine and his manner of life, his conduct; the truth of the message can be connected to the character of the messenger.[17] In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul tells Timothy to make sure he does not allow anyone to look down on him because he is young and Paul charges Timothy to set the example in conduct and speech because he was called to be different in Ephesus. While the majority were following false teachings and cults, Timothy would stand out by following Paul's examples because Paul followed Christ. *The Word Commentary* states that the letter was encouragement for Timothy that persecution is inevitable, but it is just like Paul, Timothy was called to suffer without shame. Any teaching that denies the necessity of suffering is in direct opposition to Paul's gospel which embraces suffering as a necessary part of the Christian experience.[18]

Paul calls Timothy to suffer with him for the gospel and not be ashamed of Paul or the gospel. Timothy needed encouragement to be faithful and to trust God. The Apostle Paul charged Timothy to remember his examples. Paul called Timothy not to be ashamed but to willingly suffer for the message of the gospel. Paul was called to proclaim this gospel; and therefore, suffers as he does and not only encourages but charges Timothy to follow Paul's pattern of sound words and guard the gospel. Paul urges Timothy to remain steadfast because he was a Christian teacher who represented Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul proceeds to spell out using maxims the proper attitudes and aptitudes of the Christian teacher. Timothy trusted Paul's teachings because he witnessed Paul live what he taught. Paul was able to encourage Timothy about persecution because Timothy witnessed Paul experience persecution for the Gospel's sake. "Timothy had a

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[17] Mounce, *Word Commentary Pastoral Epistles*, 521.

[18] Mounce, *Word Commentary Pastoral Epistles*, 525.

two part process: learned and then he was firmly persuaded."[19] Paul reminded Timothy that he has personal knowledge and experience because of his relationship with Paul. After Paul reminded Timothy about what Timothy had observed from him, Apostle Paul listed the persecutions he endured from Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. Second Timothy 3:11 (NRSV) states, "My persecutions and suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them."

In the book of Acts, the writer Luke writes in detail what happened to Paul in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. While Paul and a few others traveled to these specific cities, they were determined to preach the Gospel at any cost. Timothy had a close association with Paul's persecution. Timothy was able to witness the Lord rescuing Paul from persecution. In Antioch, Paul and his Barnabas were boldly preaching and teaching about Jesus. The whole town was gathered to listen to Paul and Barnabas. The Bible mentions in Acts 13:44 that the Jews noticed the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and blaspheming; they contradicted what was spoken by Paul. Paul and Barnabas continued to preach the Gospel despite the persecution, and people were saved. With the Jews being jealous, they drove Paul and his companion out of their region. The Bible says in Acts 13:51-52, that they went to Iconium, and the disciples were filled with joy. Paul reminds Timothy that the Gospel must be preached despite the persecution.

After leaving Antioch, Paul and his companion are now in Iconium preaching the same Gospel that they were preaching in Antioch. In chapter fourteen of Acts, Paul and Barnabas were bold in speaking about Jesus and a great number of Jesus and Gentiles

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[19] Aida Besancon Spencer, *Second Timothy: A New Covenant Commentary and Titus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 128.

became believers. However, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. Paul and Barnabas continued to boldly speak for the Lord; therefore, some Jews and Gentiles attempted to Stone them, but Paul and Barnabas learned of the attempt and traveled to another city to proclaim the Gospel. While Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra proclaiming the Gospel, Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city.

The Bible says the Jews from Antioch and Iconium won over the city and stoned Paul and thought he was dead. However, the disciples gathered around him, and he sprang up and went to the next city to proclaim the Gospel. Paul wanted Timothy to be bold and trust that God will protect him if he continues to preach Jesus despite the danger that comes with preaching the Gospel. Paul did not want Timothy to stop preaching because of persecution. So, Paul reminded Timothy of the persecution he endured during his ministry. The Apostle Paul wanted Timothy to know that he had multiple examples of how he could rescue Timothy from persecution. Apostle Paul attempted to explain that persecution was inevitable for the sake of the Gospel. In *The Word Commentary,* it suggests that some writers have questioned the author's choice of these persecutions if Paul did not meet Timothy until his second missionary journey; therefore, Timothy did not witness or know Paul's earlier persecutions. *The Word Commentary* suggests that the author of 2 Timothy allegedly shows that he knows the Book of Acts but not Paul.

Paul Tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12 that indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. The Apostle Paul suggests that all people who decide to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will face some trials and tribulations for the sake of Christ, the word want in verse twelve means to desire, wish, or are willing to face

persecution according to the *Interlinear Bible*. This suggests that all people have a choice to live for Jesus, but if that is their desire, then persecution is inevitable. Live in Greek is Zao, which means to live, and experience God's gift of life. The Greek word Zao paints the picture of one who is alive in Christ. Paul tells Timothy that all people who desire to be alive in Christ will have to suffer for him. The Apostle Paul is honest with Timothy, reminding him that suffering comes to all people who are willing to experience the gift of life and being alive in Christ. The apostle's experience of suffering is applied to all Christians in the form of a general thesis.[20] Paul wanted Timothy to remain faithful to the Gospel and lead by example. "William Tyndale suggests that Paul exhorts Timothy to go forward as he had begun and to preach the gospel with all diligence, as it needed to be, seeing many had fallen away and false spirits and teachers had sprung up already."[21]

Paul's overall message in verse twelve is godliness brings persecution. Paul shifts the thought from Timothy to "everyone." Paul writes all who want to live a godly life will be persecuted. The verb "will be persecuted" picks up the term used twice in Paul's experiences, which involves everyone in the Pauline "way" and normalizes it. In other words, Paul's experience underlines the inevitability of the outcome. When Paul mentions the godly being willing, Paul suggests that only the godly are those who are real believers in Jesus Christ and their faith will be persecuted but rescued by Jesus. Paul's language intends to distinguish between genuine and false believers in verse twelve to verse thirteen.[22] "According to 2 Timothy 3:13, it states, "But wicked people and

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[20] Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 80.

[21] Lee Gatiss and Bradley G. Green, *Reformation Commentary on Scripture* (Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019), 497.

[22] Philip H. Towner, *The International Commentary on the New Testament: The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 50.

impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived." In verse thirteen, Paul is now writing about the wicked and imposters. The apostle compares the godly to the genuine believers of Jesus Christ and those who want to live for Christ. Paul calls the false believers imposters who have denied the power of true godliness and those who deceive. Paul wanted Timothy to be aware of the imposters. Paul contrasts the situation of the Christians with that of their opponent in verse thirteen. Paul is suggesting that the godly will be persecuted and rescued but the ungodly will prosper, getting worse and worse with no apparent hindrance to their evil influence. "One cannot be in the combat and live luxuriously, one cannot be wrestling and feasting."[23]

The message was not only to Timothy but to all believers. In verse thirteen, it is better to suffer for Christ on earth because judgment and punishment for the evildoers will be worse than persecution. Paul compares the godly teachers to the imposters. Those who are imposters are those who practice magic and who are false teachers. As false teachers, they actively deceive and enslave others with their false message, being deceived as well. Timothy had to make sure he remained godly and preached the truth amid a community who were easily influenced by false teachers. Paul needed Timothy and the other believers to be able to recognize the false teachers so they could continue to defend the faith and be easily deceived. According to the *International Commentary*, evildoers and imposters do not intend to distinguish two classes of sinners. Rather, the focus of the more general reference to evil-doers is narrowed to the second, more striking reference to imposters.

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[23] Mounce, *Word Commentary Pastoral Epistles*, 550.

When Paul warned Timothy about deceivers, Paul refers to those who are ignorant, not knowing anything but merely guessing believing they are deceiving; but they are the ones being deceived. The deceiver uses charm and enchantments when they bring their trickery to play against the divine word of God. Evil people and imposters will flourish according to Paul, but they will flourish in the wrong way and the wrong direction, to their destruction.[24] Paul encourages Timothy not to become discouraged because the wicked prosper.

Timothy must remain faithful and trust that God will reward those who are true believers of Christ. The Apostle Paul refused to allow the evil in the world to dissuade him from preaching the Gospel. Paul wanted Timothy to carry on the ministry that God had called Timothy to do for the glory of God.

According to 2 Timothy 3:14 –15 (NRSV), states, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that can instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." In verse fourteen, Paul commands Timothy to remain steadfast in the gospel. Timothy needs to be firm in the faith and remember whom he learned the Gospel from during his childhood. When Paul tells Timothy to remain, Paul is encouraging Timothy to abide or endure despite the persecution. Paul encourages Timothy to stay with the Gospel and remain faithful to the call and Christ despite the false teachings. Timothy must stick with what he has been convinced of since his childhood. Despite the false teachers and apostasy, Paul tells Timothy to never forget the

[24] Jon C. Laansma, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 17 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 150.

truth and he must be satisfied with the truth. Paul reminds Timothy that he was taught the truth when he was a child because Paul was not making it known to Timothy that the truth never changes.

In verse fourteen (b), Paul brings to Timothy's attention that he knows from whom he learned the truth. Paul was Timothy's mentor and spiritual father. However, Timothy first learned the Gospel from his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois. The formative faith in Timothy's life was because of two women who were important to Timothy. Paul does not take complete credit for Timothy's faith. Paul reminds Timothy that he was raised by faithful women, and the faith that now lives in Timothy lived in his mother and grandmother. Eunice and Lois helped to rear Timothy in the faith when Timothy was an adolescent. The apostle urged Timothy not to forget the truth and the God he was raised to trust. Timothy's mother and grandmother were powerful influences for Timothy as a child. Paul acknowledged that Lois and Eunice had a huge impact on Timothy; and therefore, Timothy began to fight for the faith he was taught as a young man. The apostle mentioned these two women during a time when women were often overlooked and never mentioned. Lois and Eunice made a big contribution in Timothy's future and ministry. In verse fourteen, Paul reminds Timothy who had taught him the Gospel. Paul moves from who taught him during his childhood to encouraging Timothy to never forget what he was taught in his childhood. The Apostle Paul refers to what Timothy has learned as "Sacred Writings."

Most scholars, according to the *Word Commentary,* suggest that when Paul mentions the sacred writings, Paul was referring to the Hebrew scripture. When Timothy was a child, he was taught the Hebrew scripture. The sacred writings played an important

role in Timothy's upbringing. The sacred writings were important to Timothy because Timothy was raised in a house with a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Paul mentions the sacred writings and encourages Timothy to stick with them because it would instruct him for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Although Timothy learned the sacred scripture, Paul mentions salvation and faith in Jesus to encourage Timothy that the Hebrew scripture and the Gospel are joined together. When Timothy was a child, he learned scripture and continued that learning as a young man when journeying with Paul.

Paul talks about the sacred writings and how the Hebrew scriptures are a source of confidence and instruction for Timothy. However, Paul wanted Timothy to know scripture alone is not enough to be saved but it is faith in Jesus that brings salvation. The sacred writings point to Jesus and without faith, scripture cannot be understood. Paul was not disregarding the Hebrew scriptures but emphasizing the completeness and clarity brought by the gospel of Jesus Christ.[25]

The Anchor Bible asks a very important question. How can the Torah instruct you for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? Paul suggests that the Torah and Christ do not oppose each other but illuminate each other.[26] The purpose of the Torah is to reveal Jesus Christ and God's way of making humans righteous by the response of faith in Jesus Christ. The Hebrew scriptures remain the framework for believers to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The Holy Scripture points not only to Timothy but to all people who are willing to live a godly life for the sake of Jesus Christ. The sacred writings give wisdom and understanding about salvation. Hebrew scripture was not only

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[25] Mounce, *Word Commentary Pastoral Epistles*, 600.

[26] Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 50.

important in Timothy's childhood, but the sacred writings were essential for Timothy's adulthood.

The message of salvation started in the Old Testament and has been fulfilled in the Gospel and Paul charged Timothy to preach the scripture despite persecution. Timothy was charged to continue in the work of as an evangelist. Timothy was also encouraged to stay true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and continue to preach all scripture.

According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, it states, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." Paul wanted Timothy to understand that the word would help him get through inevitable adversity.

"The power of the Bible to affect change and demand obedience resides in the fact that all scripture is God-breathed. The Bible originates with God. Claims of origin carry great significance because authority lives in the creator. This is why people invest such herculean efforts in trying to disprove God as the earth's creator and in questioning the authenticity of the Bible. Admitting to God's authorship is an acceptance of God's authority over every aspect of life. By stating that the scriptures are God-breathed, Paul established the Bible's claim as God's authoritative Word over people.

All scripture is God-breathed. Verse sixteen (a) has played a central role in the Church's doctrine of the inspiration of scripture.[27] Paul was calling Timothy to loyalty and perseverance in his proclamation of the true Gospel. Paul encourages Timothy to preach the Gospel and stay true to scripture and he would have a successful ministry.

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[27] Mounce, *Word Commentary Pastoral Epistles*, 525.

Timothy was able to preach the Gospel despite hardship because the message he proclaimed was from God and not human. Paul stated that all scripture is God-breathed meaning scripture is the word of God and God's word is reliable. "After exhorting Timothy to hold fast to the sacred scriptures he was taught, and those were the Old Testament scriptures, Paul now proceeds to describe them."[28]

"Paul highlights two key characteristics of scripture: from whom does it originate and for what purposes is it helpful. Paul says, "God-breathed," is like breathing the breath of life into a mass of dirt and creating Adam alive."[29] Although Timothy had to do ministry in a place filled with false teachers and doctrine, Timothy had the Living Word to keep preaching and living. Paul's logical moves are the outfitting of Timothy for taking over the apostolic ministry and particularly, though not exclusively, with the opposition and the effective use of the scriptures in mind. The various uses of scripture (v. 16b) first make the Anthropos of God "capable," proficient (NRSV), or even "complete," that is, fully outfitted for the task. In this case, "full outfitting" or completion" (artios) is to be understood about the function scripture can perform, and the tools the Anthropos of God must have at his or her disposal for the task. "The word play simply draws attention to the place Paul wishes Timothy's (and the listening church's) attention to be focused namely on the activities in v.16 and with the goal of v. 17."[30]

This study of 2 Timothy is foundational to my doctoral project. Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church does not have a formal discipleship strategy for youth. As Wheeler

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[28] The Bible Says, "2 Timothy 3:10-17 Meaning," TheBibleSays.Com, accessed January 29, 2024, https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/2tim/2tim-3/2-timothy-310-17/.

[29] Daniel M. Doriani, *2 Timothy and Titus* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2020), 70.

[30] Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 60.

Avenue implements a full discipleship strategy it will produce engaged, mature adults. If a discipleship model is implemented, then the youth will become mature disciples and effective church leaders. Second Timothy chapter three, Paul is a disciple of Jesus; therefore, Timothy is also a disciple. In my context, a lot of young people attend church on Sunday. Every first and third Sunday, we have Bible and Breakfast for the youth. Bible and Breakfast consist of physical and spiritual food while learning together in breakout sessions. Just like Paul did for Timothy, Wheeler Avenue can teach the young people to the word of God and empower the youth to defend their faith.

Not only do we have Bible and Breakfast but every second and fourth Sunday we have Youth Church. Youth Church consists of two worship experiences at eight o'clock a.m. and eleven-thirty a.m. with the Youth. Whether first and third or second and fourth the youth get a chance to learn why becoming a disciple of Christ is essential to their future. However, the church is not enough. Paul spent time with Timothy teaching and setting examples for young Timothy. In 2 Timothy 3:10-17, Paul is being honest with Timothy about the consequences Christians face for being a disciple of Christ. Timothy was reminded of Paul's example. The apostle's example was to be emulated in so far as he followed Christ.[31]

The doctoral project will find ways to build a discipleship model for young people so that they will not move on from Christ although they must move on from Youth Ministry.

> We should be concerned with the faith journeys of our youth. The spiritual lives of millions of young people are at a stale. A person sets his or her moral and spiritual foundations early in life, usually before thirteen, yet the teen young adult years are a significant period of experimentation, of testing the limits and reality

[31] David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 and 2 Timothy* (Nashville, TN: B and H publishing Group, 2013), 145.

> of those foundations. In other words, even though the childhood and adolescent years are the time during which spiritual and moral from high school to the late twenties is the time when young person/s trajectory is conformed and clarified.[32]

The doctoral project will help young people have the desire to love Jesus and represent Jesus despite the temptation they are up against. Timothy was up against idolatry and Paul wanted Timothy to understand the importance of remaining faithful as a disciple because disciples make disciples. Paul's specific instructions to Timothy will help young believers, specifically Middle Adolescents, remain faithful and focused despite the ongoing distractions in the world. The discipleship model may change but the mandate remains the same. Jesus commands his disciples to teach others what he taught them, and Paul was doing that through his life, and speech.

Young Christians believe that churches are not safe and hospitable places to express their doubts. Many feel that they have been offered slick or half–baked answers to their, honest questions; and they are rejecting the talking points they see among the older generations.[33] Paul was honest with Timothy about persecution and the doctoral project will build young disciples by being completely honest with their questions and concerns about life and the difficulties of being a disciple. In John 16:33, Jesus was honest with his disciples by telling them that they would have trouble.

In John 15:18-25, Jesus also said "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: A servant is not greater than his master, if they

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[32] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 31.

[33] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 11.

persecuted me, they would also persecute you." Jesus warned his disciples about persecution and Paul does the same to Timothy. Although persecution is inevitable, following Jesus will pay off. Jesus' disciples and Paul decided to remain disciples even after hearing the truth about persecution. The doctoral project will help young students make the same decision.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

When I was growing up in church, my dad made sure my family attended Sunday school every Sunday at 9:00 a.m. Sunday school for the children and youth at my church was the only time all the young people would be able to collectively worship and learn about God. We did not have the privilege of a Youth Church. There was a youth choir, youth dancers, and youth drill team. The youth had the opportunity to oversee the service every fourth Sunday, but Sunday allowed the youth to meet God on our level and understand the lesson from our teacher.

My context, Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, is a bit different. We do not have traditional Sunday School anymore. Sunday School was an option for the youth and our participation was not what it should have been, especially for a mega church. We now have a Youth Church, and more youth are willing to attend Youth Church. Youth Church is the new Sunday school. However, there would not be a "youth church" without the origin of Sunday school. My context strives to teach about Jesus and make disciples so that we can obey Jesus' command to be his witnesses on the earth. Since my context is intentionally intergenerational, we have what we call Bible and Breakfast in place of traditional Sunday school, but Christian Education is what my context prioritizes for each generation. We believe young people should be in Church not just for activities but to

learn to become educated in the word of God and how to apply the word to their lives. Our example for the youth is Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve.

"Jesus consistently participated in his home to rituals and feasts mandated by the law."[1] In Luke 2:21-39, Jesus was consecrated and circumcised. When Jesus was a boy, he went with his parents and community to the Passover in Jerusalem and Jesus was eager to learn. When Jesus was in the temple, Jesus was sitting with the teachers, listening, and asking questions. Although Jesus was only twelve, Luke tells us the people were amazed at Jesus' exceptional abilities.

Jesus received a basic synagogue education. Jesus was taught to write and read, and Jesus learned about the leaders of Israel. Jesus was taught the history of the Jewish people, and he was also taught Hebrew poetry and proverbs. The synagogue was not just a place to worship, but it was also a place to educate people and teach them the tools they would need to live and be successful in the world. Some have concluded that Jesus had further educational avenues. Some suggest Jesus was instructed and shaped by a community of Essenes, a monastic Jewish sect of the intertestamental and New Testament periods.[2] Although there were similarities between the teachings and terminology of Jesus and those of the Essenes, there were also significant "differences." Education played a major role in the life of Jesus and the synagogue played a major part in the upbringing of Jesus. In biblical antiquity, the synagogue was the educational system for the youth.

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[1] James E. Reed, *A History of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1993), 62.

[2] Charles Francis Potter, *The Last Years of Jesus Revealed* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1962), 42.

Jesus was an effective teacher because he was the Son of God but more than that he took the time to learn and apply what he was taught to his life. Jesus is the perfect example of taking education seriously. To grasp Jesus the teacher one must understand the role models he looked up to and how these role models revealed themselves in his life." Jesus was influenced by the great teachers of history. Jesus was influenced by what he was taught.[3]

This historical chapter will show how Robert Raikes began the Sunday School Movement to help educate young poor children. Robert Raikes, who was an English philanthropist and Anglican layman was known for creating the Sunday School Movement. Sunday School helped to educate young uneducated working children and eventually birthed a movement that is still in existence in the twenty-first century.

In the book *The Story of Robert Raikes for Young,* Sunday School describes a watch that has never stopped for over a hundred years. The book acknowledges the Sunday School Movement as a movement that has "never stopped, never grown tired; and what at first seems wonderful is, that as it has grown older, it has grown younger, more beautiful, more full of power, more full of delicious music."[4] What is more, should it live for a thousand, or ten thousand years, it will become younger and younger, more lovely, more full of richer tones, and will never cease this putting back the "shadow on the dial until every child, in every nation upon the earth, shall each Sabbath Day swell the chorus which God loves to hear from the lips of the children."[5]

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[3] Robert H. Stein, *The Methodist and Message of Jesus' Teaching* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1978), 37.

[4] Alfred Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia American Sunday School Union, 2010), 75.

[5]Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 23.

Robert Raikes, The Founder of Sunday Schools, was born in the city of Gloucester, England. In the eighteenth century, the city of Gloucester, England was full of contrasts, full of churches, and full of crime; with plenty of wealth and over-filled with poverty; full of charities and full of suffering. There were Charity schools, Dame Schools, and Grammar and Collegiate Schools. There were learned men in the Cathedral close, and out of it, but the majority of the population was ignorant of almost everything outside of their proper trade or calling. "Most people did not know their A, B, Cs. The parents who were ignorant raised their children in ignorance. Many of the uneducated people were poor citizens."[6]

Raikes' mother was Mary Drew, and his father was Robert Raikes. "Robert Raikes' father was known as an Elder and a newspaper publisher. According to the story of Robert Raikes, his father was a practical man of business.[7] Raikes' father was a kind-natured man and in times of distress inserted the advertisements of charitable organizations free of charge. He was a humane man and wrote against the fashionable sport of cock fighting and made frequent appeals for the relief of poor debtors in prison. There is not much to tell you about Robert Raikes the elder, but the little that is known is valuable, because of the influence on the life and character of his son. Now, Raikes' mother was twenty-five years younger than her husband. "Mary Raikes must have had the domestic virtues well developed in her, and she made their home beautiful."[8] Her

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[6] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 75.

[7] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 80.

[8] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 50.

husband confided in her judgment and motherly love, and he trusted her to manage the business during his absence.[9]

Raikes was twenty-one years old when his father died. Raikes was committed to taking over his father's business. "Raikes mother believed of her children should be well educated, and settled in life, and become known for their sterling qualities and charities, speaks volumes."[10] Raikes was blessed to take care of his siblings and his mother. Robert attended the St. Mary de Crypt Church in Gloucester, England where he was baptized and became a Bible Student.

When Raikes was growing up, he attended the St. Mary de Crypt Grammer School but left to attend the Cathedral College School. The school Raikes attended birthed many good scholars. As we can see, Raikes was an educated young lad. There was a religious atmosphere at the school he attended. Every day school would begin at six o'clock and the children would sing psalms and pray. After a while, Raikes left school to be an apprentice to his father and his dad was proud of his son's calling. Raikes upbringing played a major role in his life. Raikes was skilled in writing and reading. "It would be right to imagine Robert Raikes as a "great scholar;" he was simply a well-educated man, very superior to ordinary citizens engaged in trade, and able to hold his own when in the company of "men of letters" and "men of the world," which was of very great advantage to him when he came forward with his plans for popular education and the institution of Sunday-schools."[11]

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[9] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 40.

[10] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 66.

[11] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 70.

Gloucester, England was a cathedral city, full of clergy, some of whom eked out their incomes as tutors in private families. Some suggest Raikes could have been privately tutored. Raikes decided not to go to a university, but he made sure to invest in his education.[12] When Raikes turned thirty-one, he chose to get married. He and his bride were considered beautiful, intelligent, and well-dressed. "In the eighteenth-century dress was important and for men, it marked a man's rank in life in the eyes of the people more readily than his pedigree. Roberts Raikes was considered the "dandies of the day."[13] However, Raikes did not allow his social status to cause him to forget who he was raised to be and that he was one who looked out for the least, last, and left out. The Raikes family believed in charity.

During that time and in that specific area, the condition of the children of the working classes in 1780 was considered a problem that required courage to face. When Robert Raikes was forty-four years of age, he began researching children because his experience on adults had failed. "He commenced with adults and failed. After his failure, he did not quit but he changed his method."[14]

Raikes love for kids fueled him, to "study the child life at close quarters, and he very soon found that he was right on track."[15] Raikes was a Bible student. However, as he began to study children, two Bible scriptures had a different meaning to him. "Train up a child in the way he should go" and "Suffer not the little children."[16]

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[12] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 35.

[13] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 40.

[14] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 40.

[15] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 42.

[16] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 45.

The two texts did not have the same meaning for him afterward, "if he would have known what the scriptures really meant earlier in his life, he would have known earlier what to have done."[17] One day a destitute woman shifted Robert Raikes' perspective by telling him, "The street is filled with multitudes of these wretches, who released on that day employment, spend their time in noise and riot, playing a chuck and cursing and swearing in a manner so horrid as to convey to any serious mind an idea of hell rather than any other place. Raikes referred to the condition as a vice."[18] However, he believed vice was preventable, and the best way to make a change was to start with the child. The children had bad habits, but the apple did not fall too far from the tree. Raikes knew the parents of the children who were imprisoned and the habits of their class, and he argues with both parents and children that neither they nor their ancestors had ever entered the house of God for worship. I agree with Robert Raikes' sentiments that children pick up bad habits from parents, but to create change, we must first start with the child. "As Raikes would suggest, nothing simpler since the days of the Apostles ever crossed the mind of Christ."[19] In other words, When Jesus Christ wanted to make a difference, he discipled young men and taught them a different way than what they were taught. Change starts with children.[20]

Robert Raikes was determined to be like Jesus Christ. Sunday School started because of the condition of the children Robert Raikes wanted to help. "The Children

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[17] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 88

[18] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 75.

[19] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 50.

[20] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 76.

were in groups, bright eyed, and intelligent; full of fun and frolic and mischief; uncombed, unwashed, ragged, and disgusting."[21] The children were in a horrible condition. The word that was used to define the condition of the children was "waste." However, that did not stop Robert Raikes from trying his best to make sure they had a better and brighter future. While everyone viewed the children and their condition as "waste," Raikes saw potential in the children. Robert Raikes knew that all the precious, budding, talent shown in impish ingenuity was worse than wasted, because by and by native wit and invention would be put to bad uses."[22]After reflecting on the children's condition and futures, the only word that came to his mind was "try!" While most men would have given up, Raikes simply wanted to "try" because he refused to allow a generation go to waste. The new generation of England depended on the children's greatness. Robert Raikes did not want the children to go down the same path as their parents. He was committed to trying his best to imitate Christ. "As Robert Raikes was brainstorming trying to figure out a way to save the children, Raikes met The Reverend, Thomas Stock, Vicar of St. John the Baptist, and Headmaster of the Cathedral. Reverent Tomas Stock and Raikes discussed Raikes' concerns with the children's condition. We do not know how the conversation went exactly but we do know they agreed to come together and do something about the situation."[23]

After their discussion and agreement to team up and help the children, they found some poor, but respectable, women who agreed to teach the children on Sundays; they

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[21] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 76-77.

[22] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 80.

[23] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 80.

also visited some parents in the city slums and induced them to send their children to the poor but respectable teachers instead of turning them into the streets.[24] Robert Raikes and Reverend Thomas laid the foundation of what is now nationally known as Sunday School. "Raikes first idea of Sunday School was what we now know as a Ragged School, kept on Sundays by women paid one shilling per week, and extra for coals."[25] Raikes idea of Sunday School turned into a three-year experiment from 1780 to 1783. Raikes wanted to experiment before he ventured to let the world know anything about the Sunday School project. The author believes "Raikes was not a man of hurry, and he was astonished at the results."[26] Of course, when he began the experiment, he had not trained the children. "When he first took the children to church, they did not know how to behave but he taught them to bow, as a sign of reverence, on entering a holy place." It took a while for him to get the children under control. "Raikes found that the children stuck pins into one another, and fought, and swore, and were turned out by the parish "beadle," but he didn't give up on the children. He sat close to them and got the children under control."[27]

Some people did not believe in Raikes and his new experiment, but during the three years he experimented, with the help of his friend Reverend Stocks, Raikes opened seven or eight Sunday Schools in the city. Raikes was making a difference in his town and breaking barriers as well. During the three years, Raikes allowed young women to

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[24] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 80.

[25] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 55.

[26] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 55.

[27] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 85.

attend Sunday School; and they were worse than the boys. In that time, it was more difficult to manage the girls. “The young girls were publicly whipped through the streets, and for using their tongues too freely were often drowned in horse-ponds.”[28] The women were being mistreated for being “unruly.” Some of the scholars believe that the mistreating of the women was proper punishment. I the writer disagree. It seemed as if the children did not know any better because of their lifestyle. The young ladies did not deserve to be punished but they needed someone to be patient with them; Robert Raikes was patient and made sure to give them a chance just like he did the young men.

Robert Raikes believes when the little girls saw what nice boys their brothers were becoming, with their clean faces, and hair combed, and that shoes and clothes were given to them, they thought it would be a nice thing to attend Sunday-school as well.”[29] When the young ladies attended school, they made sure to separate the boys and girls. The children began to grow and transform into their own parents. The Raikes experience was really working out for the children and Raikes was making a difference in the lives of these poor children. Sunday School was the perfect idea to transform the children from poor and uneducated to respectable educated children. “Raikes results astonished those who produced them.”[30] Before Sunday School, the children were often overlooked but “The rule on which mankind had acted for ages was reversed.”[31] The new rule was the child first. Raikes changed the people’s perspective on how to treat children. All the

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[28] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 64.

[29] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 43.

[30] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools,* 55.

[31] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 90.

children needed was someone to believe and invest in their future. With Raikes' commitment to the children, those who witnessed Raikes' experiment applauded Raikes and his team.

As I make a quick switch from the story of Robert Raikes to James E. Reed and Ronnie Prevost's book *A History of Christian Education*, I want to give an example of how Christian education was reaching other countries because of Robert Raikes' Sunday School experiment. Robert Raikes was anxious to show the world how Sunday School could change the lives of young children all over the world. According to James E. Reed, every ancient society must have had, by some definition, a system of education. "Education began early in the life for a Spartan child."[32] James E. Reed gives us history on the children in Spartan. If the children were considered healthy, they were trained for citizenship; and the other children were exposed to die. The children did not have free will. He submits that if a child could live, the mother had charge of her son until he turned seven or if she had a daughter, she could be able to charge her for a few extra years.[33]

The children especially the young men, were trained in physical activity at the age of seven. The living conditions were horrible! "Provisions at the schools were scant: the bed was hard; food was meager. (They were trying to get the boys ready to endure hunger in war); clothing was skimpy; blankets and sandals were nonexistent.[34] Also, the boys were taught to steal as part of their training for war.

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[32] Reed, *A History of Christian Education*, 70.

[33] Reed, *A History of Christian Education,* 71.

[34] Reed, *A History of Christian Education,* 72.

As the young men grew older, they were forced to receive military training at the age of eighteen. They were also compelled to get married after the age of thirty only to have children so the next generation of boys could eventually train for war. The boys from Spartan were being educated but only for war. They were physically trained but lacked intellectual training because it was unimportant to the Spartans. "They were concerned with functional literacy."[35] The Spartans were concerned with functional literacy. Reading was rejected except for reading and learning the laws. The Spartan men grew up only hearing stories from the older men but as far as education, "Spartan system was characterized by total subservience of the individual to the group, education by force, and schooling for the sake of technique only. The curriculum physical and military training underscored the Spartan aims of strength, endurance, patriotism, obedience, and military efficiency."[36]

However, Athens which was a Greek city-state that arose, with Sparta. Athens was only about a day's journey from Sparta, the two cities were separated by differing views of the nature of people. The young boys in Athens did not receive formal education until the ages of six to eight but unlike Spartan boys, Athen's boys were able to experience education.

> Athenian children remained at home and received no formal education until six. The boys from well to do families entered school one or two years later. There were four types of schools that existed: elementary schools for boys aged six to thirteen or fourteen; secondary schools for boys aged thirteen to eighteen; schools for higher education; and military schools for boys aged from eighteen to twenty. Athenian higher education was limited not by age, as were the others but by ability and interest.[37]

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[35] Reed, *A History of Christian Education*, 71.

[36] Reed, *A History of Christian Education*, 75.

[37] Reed, *A History of Christian Education*, 72.

Most of the schools were private, and "Athenians had three types of elementary schools. Each boy was trained in a particular subject area" unlike the Spartan boys.[38] In Athens, they required an Athenian boy to attend three schools each day. They had to learn to read although it was difficult because of the form of early Greek writing. "The writing had no small letters or punctuation, and letters and words were strung together. In other words, everything that was written was all together as in one word."[39]

Although it was difficult because of the form of early Greek writing, each boy later developed reading and writing skills by studying the classical poetry of Homer and Hesiod to develop high ideals, thoughts, and virtue.[40] Not only did they learn how to write and read, but they also had "musical training developed a sense of rhythm and melody, preparing the boy to participate in Athenians civic and religious feasts and festivals."[41] Some of the parents who were poorer than other parents sent their sons to a trade school at the age of thirteen to learn a trade. Some parents could not afford tuition, but some parents were able to afford tuition for their sons to attend more advanced schools.

The boys were able to experience education but most of the schools were private. Not only were the schools private but they were temporary. They were temporary because the "teachers wandered from city to city. After a teacher had recruited enough students, he rented a lecture hall and charged admission. If the clientele fell off, he moved

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[38] Reed, *A History of Christian Education*, 66.

[39] Reed, *A History of Christian Education*, 75.

[40] Reed, *A History of Christian Education*, 73.

[41] Reed, *A History of Christian Education*, 70.

to another city."[42] As we can see, Sparta, Athens, and England had different educational experiences, but they all were determined to help the young people change for the better.

Another movement is the Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Episcopal church. According to Addie Grace Wardle, "Methodism was born in a university atmosphere and among university men."[43] Due to infidelity and formalism on behalf of faith and personal, conscious relationship with God, the movement was birthed. "Less than fifty years before Robert Raikes began the Sunday School Movement, what started out as a prayer and Bible study eventually became the Wesleyan Church of England."[44] For three years Raikes did not make his plan of public education, the rather testing it, but November 3, 1783, Raikes mentioned his plan in the *Gloucester Journal*, and later gave a full description of the undertaking.[45]

Addie Grace Wardle submits that the incident that led to the beginning of the first Sunday School under Robert Raikes relates itself to Methodist history. A woman by the name Sophia Cooke, and the Reverend Samuel Bradburn, one of Wesley's most noted preachers, who first suggested the idea of a Sunday School to Robert Raikes, assisted in first organization, marched with him at the head of scholars when they were taken to the parish church, and was one his most effective teachers.[46] "Methodism gained its largest foothold among the common people, the class for which Sunday school did its best and

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[42] Reed, *A History of Christian Education*, 70.

[43] Addie Grace Wardle, *History of Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, NY: The Methodist Book, 1918), 10.

[44] Wardle, *History of Sunday School Movement*, 20.

[45] Wardle, *History of Sunday School Movement*, 45.

[46] Wardle, *History of Sunday School Movement,* 33.

most extensive work."[47] A brother by the name of John Wesley spent his life serving the church as its director; and therefore gaining larger opportunities than Robert Raikes had to extend the Sunday School Movement.[48] Raikes set the stage for John Wesley. John Wesley realized the great movement that Robert Raikes created, and Wesley encourages the Methodist Church to join the excellent work.

Robert Raikes changes lives and taught the children how to trust in God in their everyday lives. "Mr. Raikes was not a Sunday school teacher on Sundays only, but on all days whenever children came about him. He used to attend the Cathedral service at o'clock in the morning, and children often met him to teach something."[49] Raikes was a role model for children. Sunday school was not just about education, but it was about mentoring the children and showing them how important they were to the world. Raikes used to hold "conversations" with the children." Raikes was successful with building relationships because he was willing to talk and listen to the children.

Raikes mission was to perishing men and women brands to be plucked from the burning; but he saw clearly that the child was the heir, and that to possess the child was to build the church.[50] Everyone believed Mr. Raikes was the most lauded man in the Kingdom. Raikes helped the children in the streets and transformed them into educated boys and girls.

> The boys had been taught to bow, and the girls to curtsey, when strangers entered." The children were able to answer Bible questions, sing hymns. Mr. Raikes' children looked different from other children. The children went from

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[47] Wardle, *History of Sunday School Movement,* 60.

[48] Wardle, *History of Sunday School Movement,* 37.

[49] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 36.

[50] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 87.

> being happy in their rags and filth to clean and for the girls, wearing little white tippets on their shoulders, the ends crossed over the breasts and tied behind, and white caps on their heads, also separated into classes with monitors over them.[51]

Raikes spent his life trying to show the children that there is a better path for them. "Raikes says he was showing his scholars, a little time ago, how possible it is for one invisible power to exist in bodies which shall act upon other bodies without our being able to perceive in what manner they act."[52] The way he proved it was by showing them a magnet.

> They see the magnet draw the needle without touching it. Thus, I tell them, I wish to draw them to the paths of duty, and thus lead them to heaven and happiness; and as they saw one needle, when it had touched the magnet, then capable of drawing another needle, thus when they became good they would be made the instruments in the hands of God, very probably, of making other boys good.[53]

Raikes was teaching the children to live in the community. He wanted to understand the importance of drawing other boys and girls to Christ. Robert Raikes believed the magnet lesson was the first Sunday School lesson preserved in the world.

Robert Raikes believed starting Sunday schools for children was doing the Lord's work. Although many people honored Raikes and his work, Raikes had some people who were envious of him. People were tired of hearing so much about the "benevolent" and "good." Mr. Raikes, and those who felt remorse in secret for neglecting their duty towards those committed to their charge, and those who hated what was good and wished the poor to remain so, and those who were narrow minded, though very good in their own way, and said that "teaching on the Sabbath was a breach of the fourth commandment."[54]

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[51] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 88.

[52] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 87.

[53] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 85.

[54] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 90.

Many people thought he was breaking the law by teaching on a Sunday, but Raikes thought differently. Raikes believed he was honoring God by doing the Lord's work.

Raikes had faith and started what will forever live. Raikes was committed to changing generations. "To everyone truly and heartily engaged in the work is it said, with a deep and abiding emphasis, "Be not weary in well doing," for the promise is sure and forever, "In due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not."[55]

Sunday school was a movement not just to learn Bible stories but to help the children understand life and God's purpose for them. Although Sunday School was intended for children, it is for all ages to learn about God. The story of Robert Raikes is intriguing. Raikes set the example for all youth leaders to take the time to build relationships with children and to empower them to be better. The historical topic is foundational to the anticipated doctoral project by using Raikes' perspective and model to build a youth discipleship model for my current context. In my current context, I have noticed that there is a need for community. My youth are desperate for a safe space in the sanctuary. The youth at Wheeler wants to be a part of a nonjudgmental community where they can be who they are without being condemned.

Iowa 4-H articles suggest that "Early Adolescence are concerned about physical development, being liked by friends, social, graces, and good grooming (even if they do not like to admit it). They also desire a sense of independence while still wanting help from their parents. 12- to 14-year-olds are interested in activities involving boys and girls and gain skills in social relations with peers and adults. In other words, Early Adolescence is searching for their own community. Making Disciples and creating a

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[55] Charolette Haven, *Beginning and Growth of the Christian Life* (Boston, MA: American Unitarian Association, 1867), 74.

model for early adolescences includes providing a sacred space for the early adolescences to call their own."[56]

The goal is to focus on youth ministry and provide a space to be relevant and real. Tom Rainer says it like this: "Google believes users should not be assaulted with information that is not relevant or applicable to them." To make an impact on the youth, churches must be like Google and not assault them with irrelevant information.[57] "To preach or teach effectively to youth, the preacher or teacher must prepare with an understanding of each generation and their life stages."[58]

Raikes Sunday School Movement impacted children all over the world and made them feel important. Raikes and Paul were invested in the young people and dedicated their lives to the work of the Lord. However, the model worked for Paul and Raikes because Timothy and Raikes' Sunday group submitted to authority. "The authorities that exist have been placed there by God."[59] Raikes was respected because he brought something different to the youth.

Sunday school is different from how Raikes intended to be. Sunday school is usually one hour, and it is for all generations to learn about God. However, Sunday school must be remodeled for young people to be more excited about learning about the Lord and life.

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[56] Mary Elizabeth Arnold and Ryan J. Gagnon, "Positive Youth Development Theory in Practice: An Update on the 4-H Thriving Model," University of Pittsburgh, https://jyd.pitt.edu/ojs/jyd/article/view/2020-15-6-FA-1/1178.

[57] Thomas Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing, 2011), 10.

[58] Darrell Hall, *Speaking Across Generations* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2022), 25.

[59] Tim Hawkins, *Totally Transformed* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2010), 35.

Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church does not have a formal discipleship strategy for youth. As Wheeler Avenue implements a full discipleship strategy it will produce engaged, mature adults. If a discipleship model is implemented, then the youth will become mature disciples and effective church leaders. In 2 Timothy chapter three, Paul is a disciple of Jesus, and therefore, Timothy is also a disciple. In my opinion, a lot of young people attend church on Sunday. Every first and third Sunday we have Bible and Breakfast for the youth. Bible and Breakfast consist of physical and spiritual food while learning together in breakout sessions. Just like Paul did for Timothy, and how Raikes taught his children, Wheeler Avenue could teach the young people the Word of God and empower the youth to defend the faith.

Not only do we have Bible and Breakfast but every second and fourth Sunday we have Youth Church. Youth Church consists of two worship experiences at eight o'clock a.m. and eleven-thirty a.m. with the youth. Whether first and third or second and fourth, the youth get a chance to learn why becoming a disciple of Christ is essential to their future. However, the church is not enough. Paul spent time with Timothy teaching and set examples for young Timothy. In 2 Timothy 3:10-17, Paul is being honest with Timothy about the consequences Christians face for being a disciple of Christ. The doctoral project will find ways to build a discipleship model for young people so that they will not move on from Christ although they must move on from Youth Ministry.

> We should be concerned with the faith journeys of our youth. The spiritual lives of millions of young people are at a stale. A person sets his or her moral and spiritual foundations early in life, usually before thirteen, yet the teen young adult years are a significant period of experimentation, of testing the limits and reality of those foundations. In other words, even though the childhood and adolescent years are the time during which spiritual and moral from high school to the late twenties is the time when young person/s trajectory is conformed and clarified.[60]

[60] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 30.

The doctoral project will help young people have the desire to love Jesus and represent Jesus despite the temptation they are up against. Timothy was up against idolatry and Paul wanted Timothy to understand the importance of remaining faithful as a disciple because disciples make disciples. The children were up against poverty, but Raikes wanted the children to realize that God had a better life for them. Paul's and Raikes' specific instructions will help young believers, specifically Middle Adolescence, remain faithful and focused despite the ongoing distractions in the world. The discipleship model may change but the mandate remains the same. Jesus commands his disciples to teach others what he taught them, and Paul was doing that through his life, and speech. Kyle Idleman suggests most people are fans and not followers of Jesus. In his book *Not A Fan*, he said, "My concern is that many churches in America have gone from being sanctuaries to becoming stadiums. And every week the fans come to the stadium where they cheer for Jesus but have no interest in following him."[61]

A generation of young Christians believes that the churches in which they were raised are not safe and hospitable places to express doubts. Many feel that they have been offered slick or half–baked answers to their honest questions, and they are rejecting the talking points they see among the older generations. Youth church and Bible and Breakfast are two ways to disciple the youth at the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. Also, these are two avenues to help fifteen to eighteen-year-olds understand the importance of life and God.

[61] Kyle Idleman, *Not A Fan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 25.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

"To build a strong community, you must see individuals as important and worthy, not just as tools or steppingstones."[1] If you read the Bible, you will discover that God encourages community. In Acts chapter two, those who believed in Jesus became a community and supported each other, showed love, and were compassionate to each other. Creating a safe community involves fostering an environment where individuals feel respected, supported, and secure. Jesus created a safe space with his twelve disciples. Jesus made them feel secure and safe; and therefore, they did not want to leave each other. There is an article by Marc Yonder entitled "Why Youth Leave the Church?"[2] He gives a few reasons why teens disappear after graduating high school. Marc suggests that the youth are excited and active until they are finally on their own and 70% of youth drop out of church and come back maybe a decade later.

The first reason the youth leave the church is because the church tries too hard to be trendy or "cool." When the church tries to be trendy or "cool," the church is packaging a cheap knock off the world that Jesus calls us to evangelize. Reason number two is that Marc suggests the youth have never attended church to be with. The youth are used to a

[1] Bryant H. McGill, "Bryant H. McGill Quotes," BrainyQuote, https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/bryant-h-mcgill-quotes.

[2] Church Leaders, "Resourcing, Informing, and Connecting," Church Leaders, https://churchleaders.com/.

fun and a "dumb down message pumped up the volume, and then the church is surprised when they leave and don't come back. Reason number three is that the youth get smart."[3] The church does not challenge youth, but the world treats youth as intelligent beings and challenges their intellect with deep thoughts of question and doubt. Reason four, Marc suggests most churches send young people into the world embarrassingly ignorant of the faith, which plays a role in why youth leave the church. Is the church sending the youth into the world unarmed? Is the church preparing the youth by teaching biblical principles and real life? Is the church doing a disservice to the youth when the church intentionally stays away from real-life issues? Reason number five is that the church gives kids hand-me-downs. "When kids have nothing to hang their faith on, they find other ways in college, etc. And the church loses out to things with much greater appeal to human nature."[4] Reason six states that they want community. Marc believes the youth are missing a community at church. He writes, "Have you noticed the word community is everywhere in the church however, when the youth leave home, they leave the manufactured community they've lived in for nearly their entire lives. With their faith as something they do, in the community, they soon find that they can experience. This life change and life improvement in the community in many different contexts."[5]

The article has a few more reasons why the youth leave the church but the biggest reason I would like to argue is community. The church is the perfect place to make youth

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[3] Church Leaders, "Resourcing, Informing, and Connecting," Church Leaders, https://churchleaders.com/.

[4] Church Leaders, "Resourcing, Informing, and Connecting," Church Leaders, https://churchleaders.com/.

[5] Church Leaders, "Resourcing, Informing, and Connecting," Church Leaders, https://churchleaders.com/.

disciples but without a safe space "community," the youth will continue to leave home and not return to their village. They will find another community where they can be themselves without feeling judged.

In this chapter, I would like to write about communitarian theology. Communitarian theology is a perspective within theological thought that emphasizes the communal aspect of religious life and the significance of community in shaping one's faith. It stands in contrast to individualistic approaches that focus more on personal salvation and spiritual development. Communitarian theologians believe community is essential. In other words, community is important when understanding faith, worship, service, and mutual support among believers. The interconnectedness emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals within the faith community. Therefore, the community must be created for youth to remain connected to the church after graduating from high school. It is pivotal for the youth to be in a "safe" environment where they can fellowship and experience God in their own way. I would define "safe space" as a space where the youth can feel comfortable being their authentic selves without feeling judged. The Church must provide a space where the youth can feel secure and protected physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

In the book, *Simple Student Ministry* by Eric Geiger and Jeff Borton, they write in chapter one entitled "Student Ministry Breakfast Sandwiches" about the time Howard Schultz the leader of the company Starbucks "overserved that baristas" were losing their edge in brewing the perfect cup of coffee. Howard realized that in the formative years of Starbucks, the attention of the baristas was the coffee. However, with the emergence of other food items and music, the customers' attention became divided. No longer did the

customers make it a priority to buy coffee because of the smell of the breakfast sandwiches. Starbucks was supposed to be known for the aroma of the Starbucks experience. Because Starbucks had lost its original essence and core mission, Schultz decided to close several thousand stores for several hours to refocus the company to renew its commitment to return to its original essence of Starbucks.[6]

He argues that the church needs to get back to its original essence. I believe that the Youth Ministry has lost the aroma of Christ. To ensure the youth becomes disciples, churches need a renewed commitment to the essence of the gospel and the essence of the movement of the church. We need a renewed commitment to the essence of student ministry. "Our lives and the lives of the people we lead are to be the aroma of Christ. Eric believes youth ministry has lost its essence and aroma of Christ because most youth leaders are focused on busy calendars, overprogrammed weeks, and directionless ministries have steered us away from our core mission."[7]

It is essential that the church focuses on making youth disciples. In the book *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, the writer suggests that the church should "choose life for the sake of young people, drawing the life – giving elements of religion and culture, and critiquing that which thwart life."[8] "The idea of the youth choosing life challenges a world in which many young people have few choices and in which death bells ring, death tolls rise, and death threats echo. The Book Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World is about understanding the troubling

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[6] Eric Greger, *Simple Student Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2009), 11.

[7] Greger, *Simple Student Ministry,* 12.

[8] Mary Elizabeth Moore and Almeda M. Wright, *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press Publisher, 2008), 2.

realities of this world and helping build a world in which these troubles are not the last word."[9] Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, defines a "troubling" world as "a world full of death, threats, destructive powers, prolonged violence, shootings, hunger, gang violence, water contamination, etc."[10] How do we minister to the youth when so much is going on in the world. Elizabeth mentions what the world was like in 2008. I would suggest that our youth are still living in troubling times.

This chapter seeks to raise and even create a heightened awareness for the times the youth currently is in. Youth face a variety of challenges, such as mental health concerns, acceptance of sexuality, gender identity, social and political issues such as inequality, challenges like discrimination, lack of inclusive education, and more. The question becomes, how does the church disciple the youth with everything they are up against? Another question that is worth asking is: what can the church do to ensure the youth will remain connected after high school? If the church does not create a safe space for the youth to feel comfortable being who they are or at least have open discussions about some of the challenges that are listed above. The youth must always feel welcomed. The church must be a place where open and non-judgmental communication can happen. It is imperative that the youth feel comfortable expressing themselves freely without fear of criticism. I believe community is the key to the youth becoming disciples and remaining connected to the church. The church must create a space that is supportive and inclusive. Young people should be able to feel comfortable in an environment where they feel free to express themselves. Youth will remain connected to the church when the

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[9] Moore and Wright, *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, 2.

[10] Moore and Wright, *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, 31.

church becomes a place that fosters open dialogue and understanding. A safe space for the youth is an environment where they feel comfortable, supported, and respected.

This portion of the chapter will discuss how communitarian theology emphasizes the significance of community and how community is the key to making youth disciples. In the book *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together*, Andrew Root talks about how "Dietrich Bonhoeffer was uniquely talented for youth ministry."[11] Not everyone is called or talented to work with youth. "Bonhoeffer was superb with children, and not only able to connect with them but to take them on deep theological journeys."[12] It is important for churches to invest in youth workers who are called and patient enough to work with young people. Sometimes, youth workers can cause a disconnect between the youth and Jesus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was considered the first theological youth worker. Youth ministry is usually about fun, but the youth leaders must be able to answer theological questions the youth may ask or are concerned with regarding church. Andrew Roots suggests most youth movements are born in the middle class. When Bonhoeffer was growing up, he was living within the distinct middle-class ethos of the time. "He was a number of middle-class German youth who felt disconnected and aimless. The youth were experiencing both a sense of societal purposelessness and an emotional rigidity from their fathers."[13] I like the language that the writer used to describe the youth back in Bonhoeffer's day.

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[11] Root Andrew, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publisher, 2014), 20.

[12] Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker,* 20.

[13] Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 25.

Many youths even now feel disconnected, experiencing both a sense of societal purposelessness and an emotional rigidity due to a lack of community. During the pandemic, many young people were in isolation and did not have the privilege to be in a community with others. As a consequence of a lack of community, the youth had to deal with mental health challenges. Discipleship is about community but the youth experienced isolation, uncertainty, and changes in routine that contributed to their stress and anxiety. The lack of social interactions and support systems has taken a toll on emotional well-being. The question becomes, if the pandemic did all of that to the youth, what is the church doing to cause isolation to the youth and therefore has caused stress and anxiety and mental health challenges among the youth?

The concept of youth ministry has been created for a long time and does not have a single start. "Sunday School to Public School," gives a history of youth ministry. "In the1800s youth ministry was Sunday Schools in the church that began aged group emphases to Youth for the training of young people in their Christian faith."[14]

Jim Rayburn was a pioneer in youth ministry and his most significant contribution was the founding of young life. Jim Ray Burn was raised in the church and was committed to evangelizing to those who were unchurched. His family was a Christian family that went to church whenever the doors were opened. Jim's wife was unchurched and orphaned when he first met her. However, they ended up falling in love and married. When Jim started his ministry, he realized that "running the church programs the same way as he had always seen them done was proving to be largely ineffective."[15] Jim was

[14] Dave Wright, "A Brief History of Youth Ministry," The Gospel Coalition, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-brief-history-of-youth-ministry/.

committed to the community. He was committed to connecting to the normal lives of people. Jim realized that his best contacts were with youth. The article says:

> Increasingly, Jim found that his best contacts were with the youth in the area and these times of close interaction came when he would accompany them into the nearby wilderness area for campouts and hikes. He latched on to this form of ministry due largely in part to his personal constitution and also because of his inherent love of the natural world that had been refined in the halls of academia. Not only did he connect with the youth in ways that he never had inside of the church, but he also made significant contact with the town drunk. This turned out to be providential because it was, he who financed all of Jim's further excursions with the youth in that area. It also became the prototype for Young Life fund raising - the entire community should be involved, not just a single church budget.[16]

Young Life was birth because Jim was committed to redefining youth ministry. "Young Life was Jim responding to a weakness in the church's approach to the Christian education of youth. This was not done by changing existing structures, but by becoming one of the pioneers in the parachurch movement and by creatively using camps to bring Christ to students."[17]

Young Life is known for its innovative and relational approach to ministry, aiming to engage them. Youth where they are in schools, neighborhoods, and various communities. Young Life has grown into a global organization, operating in numerous countries around the world. Christianity for young was and still is relevant to young people. Young people a contextualized message while maintaining the core of the Christian faith. Jim Rayburn's method is still working even now. Youth are still going to

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[15] Jim Rayburn, "Christian Educators," Biola University," https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/jim-rayburn.

[16] Jim Rayburn, "Christian Educators," Biola University," https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/jim-rayburn.

[17] Jim Rayburn, "Christian Educators," Biola University," https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/jim-rayburn.

camps to worship Jesus and experience a deeper spiritual reflection and connection with peers and leaders. Young Life was successful because the leaders were committed to creating an inclusive community for young people. The organization reached a broad spectrum of youth, including the young people who were not involved in the "traditional church."

In the book *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in The Life of The Church*, Michael McGarry writes on the foundation of youth ministry in the Bible. He wrote the book because he believes that many churches continue to use the same methods that have become ingrained over the last decades, while some churches question the need for youth ministry. McGarry suggests that "There comes a point in every youth pastor's ministry when he or she fearfully sits back and asks, "Am I doing this right?"[18] He believes there are three foundational problems facing modern youth ministry. The first foundational problem McGarry suggests is the dropout rate. The dropout rate is based on how many young people stop attending church after graduation from high school. According to Lifeway, "66 percent of students who were active in church during high school no longer remained active in the church between ages 18-22."[19]

The writer, Michael McGarry believes while many churches try to fix the problem with more attractive programs and relevance, the answer to the dropout rate is to consider empowering the parents and strengthen the homes in which today's teenagers are being raised. This brings McGarry to the second foundational problem. The second problem is to recognize that youth culture reflects a broader problem. He suggests it is not just the

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[18] Michael McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the Life of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publisher, 2019), chapter 1.

[19] McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, chapter 1.

youth dropping out of church –involvement. “American culture is becoming increasingly non-Christian, and the problem of youth abandoning their faith reflects the same trend among adults.”[20] The third problem is that in many churches, there is fragmentation between the church, the youth ministry, and the family. The book suggests the second and third problem could be the reason for the first problem and that is the dropout rate.

Parents have a responsibility to teach their children religious beliefs and spiritual matters. After an extended research project by the Barna Group, they discovered “majority of parents do not spend any time during the week discussing religious matters or spiritual material wither their children. Therefore, parents have caused much harm to both emerging generations and the future of the American church.”[21] Michael McGarry believes parents refuse to do what they were not equipped to do because they were not disciplined themselves. He also states “There are many reasons for the spiritual void at home. Due to the stresses faced by single-parent homes, long work weeks for parents, and students' extra- curricular activities, families do not spend quality time with each other.”[22]

It is imperative that the parents are discipled because “Youth ministry must be seen as the bridge between the local church and the home.”[23] The Youth leaders in the church and the parents must come together as a community to help the youth remain connected to the church and disciple the youth. In the Old Testament, Israel’s commitment was to make sure the next generational knew God. The family and

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[20] McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry,* chapter 1.

[21] McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry,* chapter 1.

[22] Mike McGarry, *Lead Them to Jesus* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 45.

[23] McGarry, *Lead Them to Jesus*, 45.

community were committed to raising the next generation in the fear and obedience of the Lord. The temple did not employ youth workers who organized games, service projects, and Bible lessons. "The parents had a responsibility to evangelize and disciple their children. However, the community had a vital role in ministry to the next generation."[24] The writer is trying to get us to understand the importance of community and family. For the youth to become disciples of Christ and remain connected, the church and family must work together. The book gives us an Old Testament example in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which states:

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Michael McGarry added this scripture to prove his point that God commanded the parents and community to teach the next generation to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and might in their homes and just at the temple.

The book also suggests that discipleship was not created by Jesus or the early Christians. It was the custom for a respected teacher to choose some students to become like their master, both in life and wisdom. The respected teachers spent time with students, training them in knowledge, wisdom, and skill. The teacher strived to gain a personal relationship with their students. It was more than the information but to become a disciple meant to be like the Master. Michael McGarry argues that the youth must learn

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[24] McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry,* chapter 2.

to have personal relationship with the Jesus and not just learn a whole bunch of information. One if the scriptures he used in the book was John 15:15-16, which states:

> I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name (Jn. 15:15-16).

In this verse, Jesus no longer considered his disciples to be not servants but friends. The writer is most likely trying to get us to see that maybe the goal is not to be servants but friends of Christ. The youth should want to be in a relationship with Jesus and not feel forced.

One scholar suggests the primary concern in the church and home is that "Christian parents and Pastors have collectively ignored flourishing of children by neglecting the Ephesians 6 mandate to nurture the children in the training and admonition of the Lord and the Great Commission call to make disciples who make disciples."[25] Daniel Wayne Hinton suggests that youth ministry is vital and for youth to grow and become disciples, the parents and pastor must not ignore why the Bible says to train up the child by nurturing and training them to make disciples. He also believes a more damaging indictment is the recognition that the church's children of today are the church's leaders of tomorrow.[26] Hinton is arguing that the church must do a better job prioritizing the youth. Youth ministry and in home, discipleship is imperative for the growth of the next generation.

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[25] Daniel Wayne Hinton, *The Influence of In-Home Family Discipleship and Youth Ministry on Young Adult Discipleship Making* (Louisville, KY: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 6.

[26] Hinton, *The Influence of In-home Family Discipleship,* 6.

> The early church started not in a building but in the houses of the believers. Discipleship for the youth starts at home. Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds[j] to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).

Parents have been accustomed to bringing their children to the Church for the youth leader to disciple their children, but Hinton argues that there must be a balance between youth ministry and in-home discipleship.

Chap Clark writes in chapter four that what worked for the youth a generation ago is not working for the next generation. What previous generations used to do to make youth disciples does not seem to be working like they used to. Clark suggests that it is hard for youth to trust adults and adult-run institutions. Clark stated:

> Over the last several decades the support, nurture, and guidance adolescents receive (and so desperately need) from adults has eroded. As a result, by the time today's youth reach high school, many have developed a fatalistic cynicism that makes it hard for them to trust adults and adult-run institutions. In addition, for lots of reasons, adolescence is now a much longer journey. The period between childhood and adulthood known as adolescence used to take about five years (. from roughly 13-18 years of age), but now this transitional time can take as many as 15 years (usually beginning around 11 and lasting into the mid- 20s) Maturity, in every area, simply takes longer to develop today than it once did.[27]

In the book *Creating an Authentic Youth Ministry*, Edward M. Fashbaugh submits that a healthy youth ministry flows from an intentional ministry of faith formation to and with adults. Fashbaugh also suggests that youth ministry cannot work without the help of adults. He suggests that a healthy youth ministry and healthy adult ministry is common

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[27] Mary Elizabeth Arnold and Ryan J. Gagnon, "Positive Youth Development Theory in Practice: An Update on the 4-H Thriving Model," University of Pittsburgh, https://jyd.pitt.edu/ojs/jyd/article/view/2020-15-6-FA-1/1178.

sense. “Your church’s intentional ministry to and with adults will be the fertile soil from which your youth ministry will grow.”[28] There is no way around this principle. If the goal is to have a long-term, successful ministry to and with youth, the congregation must get serious about developing intentional “strategies for discipling adults.”[29] Fashbaugh is trying to get his readers to understand that youth ministry will grow when the church has a healthy adult ministry. Why? Because the adults can help the youth to grow as a disciple of Christ. He also believes “if the church has adults that are discipled, where adults are learning how to share their faith, and where adults are engaged in passionate worship, the church will have the substance from which vital, authentic ministry to and with youth emerge.”[30]

Churches need to have responsible role models. Fashbaugh defines role model “By definition, adults are role models of faith. For better or for worse, every adult in every adult in every church serves as an example to children and teens of what it means to be a Christian man or woman.”[31] The church should be committed to making disciples but cannot do it without the role models in the church. Parents should also be role models to their children.

Mimi L. Larson and Robert J Keeley give a new perspective on discipleship. In the book *Bridging Theory and Practice in Children’s Spirituality: New Directions for Education, Ministry, and Discipleship,* the writers are focused on spiritual formation of

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[28] Edward M. Fashbaugh, *Creating an Authentic Youth Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 2005), 24.

[29] Fashbaugh, *Creating an Authentic Youth Ministry*, 24.

[30] Fashbaugh, *Creating an Authentic Youth Ministry*, 24.

[31] Fashbaugh, *Creating an Authentic Youth Ministry*, 33.

children. The definition for spiritual formation that is given in the book is: "Spiritual formation involves all dimensions of a person, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and the interaction of the human spirit with God's Spirit."[32] The writers suggest that spiritual formation is more than knowing scripture or practicing spiritual disciplines, but it is the process of Christ being formed within his followers. Spiritual formation according to Larson and Keeley, is when "a person encounters the living God through the enabling of the Holy Spirit to become more like Jesus Christ. As well as an intentional, communal process in that believers need each other for this growth to happen."[33]

Notice how the book *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in The Life of The Church, and Bridging Theory and Practice in Children's Spirituality* both suggest growing spiritually takes a community. In other words, both authors believe discipleship and spiritual formation cannot work without the help of others. Both books are about youth discipleship, youth leaders and churches need to understand that community is a necessity for the growth of children. Larson and Keeley show a chart of children's spirituality and the chart gives dates, preposition, and pedagogical focus. It is unique how they used metaphors to help the reader understand the timeline and the growth from generations.

From 1940 to 1965, the period, children were seen as sponges, empty vessels, wet cement, or clay. The writer suggests that the youth in that time learned by soaking up material. They were shaped and molded by human teachers. If that is true, that would suggest that children's spiritual knowledge was based on what was taught to them.

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[32] Mimi L. Larson, *Bridging Theory and Practice in Children's Spirituality: New Directions for Education, Ministry, and Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 10.

[33] Larson, *Bridging Theory and Practice in Children's Spirituality,*10.

However, in the FOR period, which is from 1965 to 1990, children were viewed as consumers, participants, explorers, or surveyors. “The interest of the child played a significant role in their spiritual growth. The children were actively a part of Sunday school. The writers even include that “Children were seen as catalyst for encouraging their parents to attend every week because the children did not want to miss out on fun.”[34] From 1990 to the present, the WITH period, children can make meaning of life and experiences in ways that transcend cognitive learning. In the TO period, the teachers were considered experts.

The children learned everything from the teacher. In the FOR period, the teacher was viewed as the coordinator, of customer service. “In other words, the teacher created ways to engage the children in more active learning.”[35] The WITH period 1990-present the teacher is viewed as a partner. The teacher and students are partnering together to be like Christ, and both are striving to grow as disciples of Christ. The WITH period gives more of a communal experience. With the teacher and youth partnering together, it is important for the church to create a safe space for everyone to grow together. A space where adults can learn from the youth as well as the youth can learn from the adults. Larson and Keeley put it like this:

> The WITH period, is a shift to a more formational approach in which the entire person is involved, mind, emotions, attitudes, behavior, and relationships. The word WITH as a guiding philosophy changes the learning environment. Growth in the learners is desired but in a carefully designed environment more like a cultivated garden than a meadow filled with wildflowers. The Space for growth is viewed as sacred; the pace has elements that are slow and gentle; the volume is joyful without being raucous, and voices are often soft. WITH environment is like

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[34] Larson, *Bridging Theory and Practice in Children’s Spirituality,* 26.

[35] Larson, *Bridging Theory and Practice in Children’s Spirituality, 36*.

> being at a symphony where various parts, adults, and children, work together to make beautiful music. The leader and learners' journey with each other.[36]

Angela Hazel, in her thesis project abstract, believes parents have taken the easy route and placed responsibility on the church to disciple their children. “Parental apathy in the discipleship of children has become a worrisome issue in the Protestant churches of the United States. Where once the home was foundational of Bible learning and character building, now parents have placed the responsibility of spiritual formation of children squarely on the shoulders of the church.”[37] “Hazel submits that the church is not equipped to fully disciple the child or youth during transformational time in their lives.”[38] Hazel, along with the other writers suggest that parents play a vital role in youth ministry. Parents used to be committed to teaching their children discipline and character development in their children says Hazel. However, she believes that sports, video games, and long workdays have yielded to family quality time. In her research, she submits that the “Barna group reported according to research, parents typically have no plan for spiritual development of their children; do not consider it a priority, have little or no training in how to nurture a child’s faith have no related standards or goals that they are seeking to satisfy, and experience no accountability for their efforts.”[39]

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[36] Larson, *Bridging Theory and Practice in Children’s Spirituality,* 30.

[37] Angela Hazel, “Discipling Children and Youth: Healing the Church Enable Parents to Lead,” Digital Commons, digitalcommons.liberty.edu.

[38] Angela Hazel, “Discipling Children and Youth: Healing the Church Enable Parents to Lead,” Digital Commons, digitalcommons.liberty.edu.

[39] Angela Hazel, “Discipling Children and Youth: Healing the Church Enable Parents to Lead,” Digital Commons, digitalcommons.liberty.edu.

If research suggests that the parents are not discipling their children and placing all the responsibility on the church, this means the youth are not growing spiritually like they would if parents spent more time teaching their children about God. Most churches are only open twice a week and normally during the week the youth are busy with school. Sunday would be the only day for the youth to learn about God and only one day out of the week is not enough. Therefore, it is hard for the youth to become disciples and remain connected to the church.

My theological theme is foundational to my Doctor of Ministry project I have the opportunity at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church to effectively build youth disciples post-pandemic. In the pandemic, most of my youth were forced to be away from the community and had to spend a few years in isolation. When we could not meet in person, I tried to build a virtual community but was unsuccessful. The parents of the youth called me to see if I could spend one-on-one time with their children to make sure they are growing spiritually. Although that was my job, I was not able to see the youth due to the pandemic. The parents were with their children most of the time but failed to disciple them. The parents placed all the responsibility on me as the youth leader and the youth lost faith and hope in God because they were not able to fellowship with other youth. The youth faced various challenges that caused them to struggle with their faith. Uncertainty, isolation, and disruptions to routines could have led to feelings of fear, and doubt caused them to question the existence of God.

The pandemic caused them to raise existential questions about suffering and theodicy. The question my youth often asked was if God is good, why is God allowing the pandemic to happen? Parents play a crucial role in youth discipleship and spiritual

development. The parents had a responsibility to teach their children beliefs, values, Bible, God, and other biblical tenets. Parents serve as mentors and teachers for their children. It is important for parents to continually grow as disciples to effectively make their children's disciples as well. Parents are essential partners in youth discipleship, offering guidance, and creating a space for spiritual growth for their children.

There are also several challenges or perceived ineffectiveness of youth ministry. Youth needs a space to address the current needs, questions, and challenges they are facing. The youth also need authentic leaders to connect with them and the real issues that the youth are facing. For the youth to grow as disciples, they need a community open to new ideas and creativity. Also, a community that will be inclusive to all youth.

If I create a safe community (space) within the youth ministry, youth will become effective disciples and will remain connected to the church community. This theological perspective places a strong emphasis on the community of believers as an essential part of one's faith journey. Communitarian theologians stress the idea that faith is not just an individual experience but is lived out and nurtured within a supportive community of believers.

I will strive to create a sense of community among youth and young adults at Wheeler that can be achieved through various strategies: organize social events, study groups, volunteer opportunities, and discussions on relevant topics. Utilizing social media, creating a dedicated space within the church, and involving them in decision-making processes can also foster a strong sense of belonging.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

It has been stated by respected educator, Nel Noddings that "schools should be places in which teachers and children live together, talk to each other, reason together, and take delight in each other's company."[1] In other words, Noddings was suggesting that schools should be an environment youth should love and not despise.

> Ruth Sidney Charney is a highly respected education consultant and author. She is co-author of *The Development of Responsibility in Early Adolescence -- Approaches to Social and Emotional Learning in the Middle School* in Educating minds and hearts. Jonathan Cohen, editor (Teachers College Press. New York, NY 1999). Her groundbreaking book, Teaching Children to Care -- Classroom Management for Ethical and Academic Growth, K-8 (NEFC. Greenfield, Massachusetts 1991, 2002) has sold more than 100,000 copies. She also is author of Habits of Goodness (NEFC. Greenfield, Massachusetts 1997), and numerous other articles and chapters. Charney is co-developer of Northeast Foundation for Children. A teacher for 35 years, she worked in public schools in New York City and Massachusetts before beginning her work with the NEFC. Her formal training includes master's degrees from Bank Street College of Education and Teachers College, Columbia University. Charney currently divides her time between writing and providing professional development seminars and school consultation in the Responsive Classroom approach to teaching and learning.[2]

Responsive Classroom focuses on the students and enlightens the students on the social and emotional approach to teaching and discipline. The purpose of Responsive

[1] Ruth Sidney Charney, "Teaching Children to Care," Responsive Classroom, https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/sites/default/files/8908fm.pdf.

[2] Ruth Sidney Charney, "Teaching Children to Care," Responsive Classroom, https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/sites/default/files/8908fm.pdf.

Classroom is to create a safe space for the students to build community with their peers and teachers. The Responsive Interactive Model is different from the traditional model.

Traditional Model

The Traditional Model is when the teacher is the expert. In traditional modeling, students watch the teacher perform a skill, routine, or procedure and the teacher tells the student what to observe and expects each student to immediately learn the information that has been observed by the students. According to Stephen Perse, teaching styles have changed significantly over the years. "The traditional or conventional way of education was delivered through recitation and memorization technique."[3] In other words, conventional education is when the teachers do all the talking while the students sit quietly, trying to comprehend what is being taught. Traditional education is teacher-centered. The educator plays a significant role in the classroom and is the primary source of information and instruction. The "old-fashioned" way of education means education in which instruction takes place between an instructor and students where all are physically present in the same classroom. "The traditional and modern education article suggests traditional education is less complicated and is a great way to be exposed. However, the article also suggests the disadvantages of traditional education are students in a passive role, and because the teacher is considered the expert, its only one-way communication."[4]

[3] Stephen Perse, "Stephen Perse Foundation," Sixthform, http://www.sixthform.stephenperse.com.

[4] The Responsive Classroom, "The First Six Weeks of School," The Responsive Classroom, https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/sites/default/files/8908fm.pdf.

Since the conventional education model is more teacher-centered, the students are not as active in the classroom. There are some positive and negative outcomes to traditional education. “Positive outcome: The students are more disciplined, strong, respectful, well mannered, and sociable. But the negative outcome: The students have no imagination, no creativity, no self, not a self-learner, not open-minded, no self-identity, and are usually unhappy.”[5]

Interactive Modeling

However, interactive modeling differs from traditional modeling. While the traditional model is for the teacher to show and tell the students what to look for, in the interactive model, the teacher shows the students the skill, and routines but instead of telling the students what to observe, the teachers allow the students to observe on their own. Also, in interactive modeling students learn not just a skill but exactly why the skill, routine, or procedure is important to their learning and the respectful, smooth functioning of the classroom.

Students are also asked what they noticed about the teacher’s modeling rather than being told what to notice by their teacher. After the student enlightens the teacher on what they have noticed, the students would then model after the teacher’s initial modeling by practicing the routine right away. As soon as the students finish modeling for the teacher, the teacher would give the students feedback and coaching from their teacher while they practice. The interactive model is designed for real time dynamic conversations. The responsive classroom permits students to have a conversation about

[5] Ayesha Tahir, “From Traditional to Modern Education,” doi:10.12681/eadd/20866.

the model by sending a progression of messages, empowering more intelligent and drawing in collaborations contrasted with one off questions. The traditional model does not really allow students to converse with the teacher and peers. But the interactive model allows the students to create a community within the classroom and allows the students to enjoy the educational journey.

Responsive Classroom approach is an interactive model that is effective more than the traditional model because the interactive model incorporates key elements of effective teaching. Students model positive behaviors by engaging students in active learning and immediately assessing their understanding. “The purpose of the interactive model is for students to learn faster, and it ensures a longer-lasting success and master skills the traditional model does not teach the students.”[6]

In *The First Six Weeks of School* book, Paula Denton and Roxann Kriete writes about the importance of making the students feel comfortable within the classroom environment. It was the first-grade teacher Deborah Porter, who tells us how important it is to give instant ownership to the students as far as their classroom. “They need to make an impact on the environment, to see that the fact that they are there makes a difference. The children also need to feel comfortable and the focus of the first week of school is upon getting to know each other and the routines and layout of the school.”[7] Although Deborah is a first-grade teacher and is speaking about first graders setting their environment, she believes all learners of all ages should be able to have safe and

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[6] Ayesha Tahir, “Traditional and Modern Education,” Slide Share, https://www.slideshare.net/AyeshaTahir42/traditional-and-modern-education.

[7] Responsive Classroom, “The First Six Weeks of School,” Responsive Classroom, https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/the-first-six-weeks-of-school/.

comfortable ways for class members to get to know each other, share their ideas, and feel a sense of comfort while learning. In other words, learning should be fun. Learning should be a communal experience. Learning should not be a burden. For this to happen, the book *The First Six Weeks of School* suggests teachers carefully plan and make sure the students understand expectations and boundaries from the moment they enter the classroom. In other words, students should not be filled with anxiety after the first day of school due to being unclear about the rules and expectations for the year.

In her book, *Teaching Children to Care*, Ruth Charney writes about the importance of seeing children and letting them know that you see all that happens in the classrooms during the early weeks. What Ruth is trying to get the reader to see is how essential it is for the teachers and students to be on the same page in the few weeks of school. How do they do this? *The First Six Weeks of School* book suggests that week one should be about community building and tone setting. In week one every student should get to know each other. Community is important. The community places warmth and welcome are evident before the students enter their classrooms. When students arrive at school, the younger students are greeted by the older students. Paula Denton and Roxann Kriete believe the older students greeting the younger students accomplishes many goals. "It increases the sense of comfort for the younger child entering a large environment. It offers the older children an opportunity to practice responsibility and to build connections beyond their own age group. And it helps more reticent children separate from parents and become involved in the activities of the classroom."[8]

[8] Responsive Classroom, "The First Six Weeks of School," Responsive Classroom, https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/the-first-six-weeks-of-school/.

All of this is a learning experience that creates the perfect environment for the students to be excited about learning. In *Journey Toward the Caring Classroom*, the writer Laurie Frank suggests, that building a community is pivotal to students' learning journey.

> The assembly- line approach to school, work, and life in general is a titanic on the sea of a changing social order. Collaboration is the wave that we should be riding in the new century. We live in an information-rich world that is shrinking, almost on a daily basis. As our smaller communities give way to global society, the number of people with whom we come into contact increases. To make sense of an increasingly complex society, people specialize, thus causing greater interdependence among us.[9]

In other words, Laurie is suggesting collaboration is key to students learning and having a successful school year.

In the book *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* by John Taylor Gatto, he debunks the idea of having a certain curriculum and writes about how he has broken away from the teaching tradition and sent kids down their separate paths to their private truth. John Taylor Gatto writes about a woman named Kathy who wrote to him about her opinion on the biggest ideas that are important to little kids. "Kathy wrote to him that she believed the biggest idea they are learning wasn't idiosyncratic for the students and that there is some system to learning and learning is not just raining down on the students as they helplessly absorb."[10] John respectfully disagreed with Kathy. John states that the first lesson he teaches his students is confusion. He teaches his students that everything is out of context. John stated, "I teach the un-

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[9] Laurie S. Frank, *Journey Toward the Caring Classroom* (Bethany, OK: Wood N. Barnes Publishing and Distribution, 2004), 2.

[10] John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down* (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publisher, 2005), 2.

relating of everything."[11] I teach disconnections. I teach too much, such as the orbiting of planets, the law of large numbers, slavery, adjectives, Architectural drawing, dance, gymnasium, choral singing, assemblies, surprise guests, fire drills, computer languages, parents' nights, staff development days, pull out programs. Guidance with strangers, standardized tests, age segregation unlike anything seen in the outside world. In other words, he teaches the students how the traditional curriculum is too much, and it is lacks of coherence.

> He states that fortunately the children have no words to define the panic and anger they feel at constant violations of natural order and sequence fobbed off on them as quality education. The logic of the school-mind is that it is better to leave school with a tool kit of superficial jargon derived from economics. Sociology, natural science, and so on than with one genuine enthusiasm.[12]

John believes it is "time that we squarely face the fact that institutional school teaching is destructive to children. Nobody survives the seven–lesson curriculum completely unscathed, not even instructors. The method is deeply and profoundly anti-educational."[13] John Taylor Gatto expresses the need to rethink school. It is not that school is a waste of time, but he believes what is being taught may be a waste of time and students should be able to learn what sparks their interest. The curriculum and school are a waste of money to John, and he believes rethinking schools would cost so much less than we are spending now that powerful interests cannot afford to let it happen. John submits that school is a business.

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[11] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 2.

[12] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 7.

[13] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 18.

As a teacher, John understands the business he is in, He says:

> You must understand that first and foremost the business I am in is a jobs project and agency for letting contracts. We cannot afford to save money by reducing the scope of our operation or diversifying the product we offer, even to help children grow upright. The is the iron law of institutional schooling it is a business, subject neither to normal accounting procedures nor to the rational scalpel of competition.[14]

John suggests that "students should attend schools that benefit them and their future, not schools that are only looking to make money."[15] He believes the answer is in the form of a free-market system in public schooling. "Religious schools and craft schools and farm schools exist in profusion to compete with government education."[16] In other words, students need to attend schools that suit them. "John suggests self-education is an option that should be taken into consideration."[17] He believes students should be home-schooled rather than attend public school. Some options exist, but they are only available to the rich, courageous, and lucky. In other words, the poor do not have a chance to attend better schools or receive a better education that will teach them what really matters to survive in this world. "The near impossibility of the one of these better roads opening for shattered families of the poor or for the bewildered host camped on the fringes of the urban middle call suggests that disaster of the seven-lesson is going to grow unless we do something bold and decisive with the mess of government monopoly schooling."[18]

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[14] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 18.

[15] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 31

[16] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down,* 31.

[17] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down,* 31.

[18] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 32.

John Taylor argues that mandated school does more harm to the students than helping the students. Why? Because the students do not learn how to think for themselves or the importance of independent thought. He believes school robs the students of their creativity and individuality. “After an adult lifetime spent teaching school, John writes, I believe the method of mass schooling is its only real content. Don’t be fooled into thinking that a good curriculum or good equipment or good teachers are the critical determinants of your son’s or daughter’s education.”[19] John suggests a more home-schooling approach.

He strongly believes “schools prevent children from keeping important appointments with themselves and with their families to learn lessons in self-motivation, perseverance, self-reliance, courage, dignity, love, and service to others, which are among the key lessons of home and community.”[20] In other words, the lessons the students need to learn should make them grow in their character, they do not learn lessons that do not matter. Usually, students were able to learn those key lessons after school, but John submits that television has eaten up most of that time.

Taylor is trying to convey that the students are not able to fully grow in their character because they are facing so many distractions and school is one of the biggest distractions. In addition to school as a distraction, students are challenged by the distraction of television, social media, and their living conditions. According to John Taylor:

> A future is rushing down upon the our culture that will insist that all of us learn the wisdom of the nonmaterial experience; a future that will demand as the price

[19] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 32.

[20] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 19.

> of survival that we follow a path a natural life that is economical in material cost. These lessons cannot be learned in schools as they are. School is a twelve-year jail sentence where bad habits are the only curriculum, truly learned. I teach school and win awards doing it. I should know.[21]

John is intentional about exposing negative aspects of school. He does not believe school is necessary for students because school does not do anything but create bad habits. He compared school and jail. He said school is like prison no one wants to go to prison. Prison is not fun but people who are in prison must complete their sentence to get back into the "real world," but when they get out, it is hard for them to find a job. John compares school to that! It is time to redefine education. John Taylor believes, "We live in a time of great crisis linked to an even greater social crisis. He suggests the great crisis that we witness in our schools is interlinked with a greater social crisis I the community."[22] In other words, school causes a separation between people. School is a sorting mechanism. When people attend school, they are often viewed as elite. Smart. Better. It separates people from the community and John suggests:

> Children and old people are penned up and locked away from the business of the world to a degree without precedent: nobody talks to them anymore, and without children and old people mixing in daily life, a community has no future and no past, only a continuous present. In fact, the term community hardly applies to the way we interact with each other. We live in networks, not communities.[23]

The Responsive Classroom Approach impacts my project because it teaches the importance of building community within the church. Just like the students at school, the same students should feel safe when they enter church. Interactive modeling will allow students to grow a closer bond with the teacher/preacher and instead of a lecture or being

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[21] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 19.

[22] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 2.

[23] Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down*, 20.

what to do or not to do, the teacher gets a chance to model for the students and the students will be able to observe and then learn together. If I can mentor sixth-grade boys through discipleship, then the boys are more likely to serve and remain connected to the ministry. However, it is important to create a positive environment for the youth to learn and enjoy serving.

My project is also like the thoughts of John Taylor, in his book *Dumbing Us Down*. He strongly believes we must be able to redefine education and what we are teaching our students. With my project, I want to be able to teach sixth-grade boys not just scripture but how to build a character that will help them become disciples of Christ. Too often we are teaching what was passed down to us, but if I can use the analogy John Taylor used in *Dumbing Us Down,* I do not want youth ministry to be a six-year prison sentence that is only teaching bad habits to the students instead of teaching integrity, perseverance, courage, dignity, love, and service to others, which are among the key lessons of home and community. I refuse to allow Christianity and the old way of thinking separate the students from the community. If the Wheeler Avenue Youth Ministry is intentional in mentoring sixth grade boys through discipleship, then they are more likely to serve and remain connected to the Wheeler Avenue Youth Ministry.

Biblical Foundations and Interdisciplinary

In my Biblical Foundation Chapter, Paul was educating Timothy on real-life experience and what it meant to suffer for Christ. Paul was honest about the Christian journey that Timothy committed himself to for the Glory of God. Paul wanted his Sons in the Ministry to understand how important it was to have a godly ministry despite the

godlessness in what Paul considered the Last Days. Timothy was assigned to ministry in Ephesus. Ephesus was known for the practice of magic, sorcery, and soothsaying, practices which found room in most or all pagan religions. Paul also wanted to address the false teachings of Ephesus due to the Christian Church being up against Gnosticism. Gnostics worshipped more than one God; while Christians believed in serving and worshipping one God. The Apostle Paul wanted to keep Timothy from being discouraged as a consequence of false teaching in the Church. Paul warns Timothy of the distressing times in the last days. In 2 Timothy chapter three, Paul charges Timothy to stay the course and keep the faith despite the popularity of false teaching. Paul did not want Timothy to give up on the gospel or allow the evil in Ephesus to dissuade him from standing in the faith.

Timothy was called to represent Christ in an area filled with idolatry. The life of Ephesus was as religiously complex as that of any other imperial Asian city. Emperor worship had come to be a part of the city's identity as an Imperial Capital. In Ephesus during the Apostle Paul's day, the city was occupied by the Artemis cult and the cult itself was at the center of commercial activity in the city. Artemis was worshipped as a goddess of fertility and purity. Paul had a thriving ministry. For about three years, Paul's ministry was marked by the works of the Holy Spirit and great success. Some opposition arose surrounding the encounter between Paul's gospel and Artemis' worship. Because of the opposition, a riot resulted in many against the Christian Movement. The church, which included Jews and Gentiles, represented an urgent threat to the well–being of Artemesian Ephesus. Consequently, this is the city where Timothy was called to do ministry.

The theory of the framework shapes my biblical foundation research by understanding the importance of teaching what is right to students. Paul was the teacher and Timothy was the student. Paul was teaching Timothy what he needed to know that would help him grow in character and as a Christian. Paul was transparent in his approach and the responsive model of education is like Paul's teaching style in the Bible. Paul communicated and built a community with Timothy; therefore, Timothy was willing to trust Paul's teachings. Paul continuously reminded Timothy that he had seen what he had to go through.

In other words, Timothy was a witness. In the Responsive Classroom Approach, students get a chance to observe the teacher and then the teacher guides the students step by step until they understand. Paul never told Timothy what to do but he showed him, and Timothy observed Paul. Therefore, it made Timothy a more effective student and Paul made an impact on Timothy.

Not all the students learn the same. When the teacher is determined to do all the talking, some of the students may not be engaged. Therefore, students may have a hard time comprehending the lesson. "Teachers have long realized the student engagement is essential for student learning; if students are not engaged with the content to be mastered, they will not learn."[24] New insights that I have gained from my biblical and interdisciplinary foundations are that students must feel comfortable. Paul made Timothy feel comfortable the same way teachers in the Responsive Classroom Model do with the students. School should be a safe space for students to build community as they learn.

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[24] William N. Bender, *Twenty Strategies For Increasing Student Engagement* (West Palm Beach, FL: Learning Science International Publisher, 2017), 2.

There should be a connection between the students and the teacher in the same way, Paul and Timothy were connected. Timothy trusted Paul.

The theory or framework shaped my research by helping me realize the importance of creating a safe environment for the students at church. After researching about the Responsive Classroom and reading about Paul and Timothy's relationship, I understand that teachers, preachers, leaders, must be intentional with engaging students and teaching them to observe and allow them the freedom to learn and participate. "Learning must be active. For students to be engaged with their learning, they must be invested, they must be involved."[25]

The responsive classroom method helps me to understand the importance of changing the teaching style. For students to love learning, teachers must be willing to work with the students and allow the students to teach the teacher. Students often get bored just sitting in the classroom and watching the teacher teach for so many hours. Responsive Classroom Method proves that it is okay for students to get up and get moving in the classroom. It forces the students to also work together and there is power in peer-to-peer learning.

According to William N. Bender, there are strategies for increasing student engagement. William provides tips to keep students engaged, and I believe it can work for youth ministry to get the students excited. William Bender suggests holding meaningful conversations. He believes it is ok to stop the lessons and ask why. He also suggests turning on some music. Soft background music helps motivate the students. Bender further elaborates by encouraging teachers to make the learning content personal

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[25] Bender, *Twenty Strategies For Increasing Student Engagement,* 3.

by showing meaning and relevance. One method is to use technology. Students today use technology in almost every aspect of their lives and integrating technology into learning will help hold the attention of many students. Give Students some choices. By making different choices among lesson assignments available to students, teachers and students are working together. Students will remain invested if they can work together to create challenging activities. Students must learn to think and team together to build community. Students are more likely to stay engaged if they can get up and have energy while learning. Lastly, William Bender suggests making it a game. Games and competitive activities foster higher student engagement more readily than simple practice learning activities. Researching the traditional model of teaching helped me to learn that the traditional model where the teacher does everything is possibly doing more harm to the students than helping them students. Working with youth, I realize it is easy to lose their attention if we do not allow them to speak or participate. The church and school must take the same approach if the youth are going to grow and mature.

Historical and Interdisciplinary

In my Historical Foundation Chapter, Robert Raikes began the Sunday School Movement to help educate young poor children. Robert Raikes, who was an English philanthropist and Anglican layman was known for creating the Sunday School Movement. In the historical chapter paper, I gave history on the origin of Sunday school and how the foundation of Sunday helped to educate working children and eventually birthed a movement that is still going on in the twenty-first century. Studying Robert Raikes and researching the Responsive Classroom approach shaped my research by

understanding the importance of mentorship. Robert Raikes saw potential in poor youth and started Sunday school to educate them. The youth were better because of his efforts to educate them and expose them to a better life. Likewise, the Responsive Classroom Model exposes youth to a better way of learning. The teachers for the Responsive Classroom model are mentors for the students.

Mentors create a safe space for mentees to learn and feel comfortable. Robert Raikes created a safe space for the poor youth to learn, grow, and build a community. My historical foundation and interdisciplinary chapters allowed me to gain new insight. In my project, I am striving to mentor sixth-grade boys through discipleship so they can remain connected to youth ministry and serve faithfully, and cheerfully during their time in the Youth Ministry.

I researched how before Sunday School the children were often overlooked but "The rule on which mankind had acted for ages was reversed."[26] The new rule was the child first. Raikes changed the people's perspective on how to treat children. The children needed someone to believe in and invest in their future. Because of Raikes' commitment to the children, those who witnessed Raikes' experiment applauded Raikes and his team. The new insight I have gained from research is showing the young guys that I care for them. Robert Raikes cared for his students. Raikes love for kids fueled him, to "study the child" life at close quarters, and he soon found that he was right on track.[27]

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[26] Alfred Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools* (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia American Sunday School Union, 2010), 23.

[27] Gregory, *A History of Origin of Sunday Schools*, 23.

Therefore, Sunday school was planted all over the world and so many young people were able to benefit because his love for them made them want to attend Sunday school. There is a need for more mentors in the church, especially within the youth ministry. When teachers care, the students will begin to care for themselves and their education. "For students to be successful in inclusive settings, their classroom behavior must be consistent with teachers' demands and academic expectations and must promote their learning and socialization with peers."[28] This theory shaped my understanding of my project because I understand how essential it is to be patient with students and build a community for them to remain faithful to God and their church.

Theological Foundation and Interdisciplinary

In my Theological Foundation Chapter, I researched Communitarian Theology. Communitarian Theology is a perspective within theological thought that emphasizes the communal aspect of religious life and the significance of community in shaping one's faith. It stands in contrast to individualistic approaches that focus more on personal salvation and spiritual development. Communitarian theologians believe community is essential. In other words, community is important when understanding faith, worship, service, and mutual support among believers. The interconnectedness emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals within the faith community. Therefore, the community must be created for youth to remain connected to the church after graduating from high school. It is pivotal for the youth to be in a "safe" environment where they can fellowship and experience God in their own way. I would define "safe space" as a space where the

[28] Pearson Higher Education, "Creating A Classroom Environment That Promotes Positive Behavior," Person Higher Education, https://www.pearsonhighered.com.

youth can feel comfortable being their authentic selves without feeling judged. The Church must provide a space where the youth can feel secure and protected physically, emotionally, and psychologically. In other words, the youth must feel welcomed into a space that they are invited to. My research with Communitarian Theology and responsive classroom approach shaped my research because it supports the need for community. I have gained some new insight regarding my project because of my research on Communitarian Theology and the Responsive Classroom Method.

Theologically, the church must focus on making youth disciples. In the book *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World,* the writer suggests that the church should "choose life for the sake of young people, drawing the life–giving elements of religion and culture, and critiquing that which thwart life."[29] "The idea of the youth choosing life challenges a world in which many young people have few choices and in which death bells ring, death tolls rise, and death threats echo. The Book Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World is about understanding the troubling realities of this world and helping build a world in which these troubles are not the last word."[30] Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, defines a "troubling" world as a world full of death, threats, destructive powers, prolonged violence, shootings, hunger, gang violence, water contamination, etc. How do we minister to the youth when so much is going on in the world? Elizabeth mentions what the world was like in 2008. I would suggest that our youth are still living in a "troubling time." The church must be a community for young men, and we must make them feel comfortable when they are young. Keeping the young

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[29] Moore and Wright, *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World*, 2.

[30] Moore and Wright, *Children, Youth, and Spirituality in a Troubling World,* 2.

men safe requires partnering with them to create the needed safe space. My research helps me understand that there is a need to provide a space for young men to be taught but also value what they have to say. Responsive Classroom Method research will help the Wheeler Avenue Youth Ministry disciple sixth-grade boys and will motivate them to serve and remain connected to the Wheeler Avenue Youth Ministry. Building a safe space for the young men to feel comfortable and keep them engaged will be important to the ministry.

In the book first six weeks of school, the writer suggests, the first six weeks of school are important. The writer gives us four overarching goals, which are to "Create a climate of warmth, inclusion, and safety, teach classroom routines and behavior expectations, help students get to know and care for the classroom and the school environment, and establish expectations for academic work."[31] To create a climate of warmth, inclusion, and safety means to build trust essential for learning. Students need to know one another and the teacher. I believe I can take the same approach with the youths. When the children graduate from fifth grade and head to youth ministry, the environment must be inclusive, and the climate of youth ministry must be warm and safe so they can feel comfortable when they first enter an unfamiliar space. I can also teach classroom routines and behavior expectations. Youth ministry and the church should always be sacred, but it is also a place to educate young boys to build character and their love for Christ. The third goal was to help students get to know and care for the classroom and school environment. I want the young boys to know and care for the designated space for the youth. The young men should care and respect the space while in the youth ministry.

[31] Responsive Classroom, "The First Six Weeks of School," Responsive Classroom, https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/the-first-six-weeks-of-school/.

The last goal was establishing expectations and academic work. The goal is for the teacher, preacher, leader, and volunteer to establish expectation and curriculum for the young men. The research has motivated me to create a space for young boys to feel comfortable. Therefore, they can be mentored through discipleship and the young boys would be committed to serving for six years. That is the total years in youth ministry.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Many youths often come to church seeking a deeper relationship with God that reaches beyond Sunday morning services. They long to truly understand discipleship and the depths of its requirements. Some parents take on the role of youth leader or spiritual leader of their homes; introducing Bible stories and making sure their child or children attend church. As a result of their leadership, young people grow closer to Jesus. However, without youth ministers or ministry leaders who can engage the youth at their level, many only experience church through adult perspectives. This causes a limited understanding of who God is and faith being shaped solely by tradition rather than authentic encounters with Jesus.

For many years, I have witnessed youth hiding behind their parents or adults in worship. The question remains, how can you truly serve a God you have not taken the time to get to know for yourself? While some churches provide support for the youth, the absence of an appointed safe space within youth churches and fellowship can stunt their spiritual growth. Young people need balance. Youth need the wisdom of the senior saints and the opportunity to connect in worship with their peers, learning about God in ways that resonate with their unique life experiences. Without this balance, for many youths church service becomes more about imitation versus consecration.

Many young people also become tied to the expectations of older generations. A lack of understanding of who you are in God's word can result in you taking on the role of someone you were never meant to be. However, as more churches make it a priority to invest in a designated space for the youth, the youth can grow to be authentic and worship God in their way. I have truly grown to value the thoughts and options my youth share about their prior experience with the church before encountering the space we have made for them now. I found it very interesting that many shared similar hesitancies to invite their friends to church because it felt like a space created for "older" people only. Some expressed their constant struggle to remain engaged in worship. They wanted a space where worship did not feel forced.

I believe family and community are important for young people to grow spiritually, I truly noticed a shift in this during post-pandemic timeframe. The absence of youth leadership left quite a deficit, resulting in spiritual stagnation. Now that we have youth church, our youth get a chance to freely worship God for themselves. With hundreds of young people and numerous worship outlets provided by Wheeler Avenue, spiritual growth has become a great possibility. Youth being open to cultivation plays a critical role in nurturing the next generation. Our church offers dedicated spaces for youth to grow in their knowledge of Christ and worship with their peers. Initiatives like "Bible and Breakfast" and "Youth Church" provide young people with opportunities to engage with scripture, participate in worship, and serve in various ministry roles. By developing a pathway that nurtures young leaders from youth to adults, youth are empowered to grow in their faith. This sets the tone to further embrace the next level of ministry involvement.

What I have found to be incredibly encouraging about youth church is the outpour of inquiries about working with the youth. The process of volunteering is not hard, but a process that is needed for the safety of our children. Every person must take the youth protection training before volunteering with our youth. After the training and passing the background check, the volunteer is then qualified to work with the youth. The training is annual to ensure that growth is not only encouraged but mandated. Most volunteers believe working with the youth means passing out food, taking them to events, being a parent while their parents are in worship, or making sure they are not staying in the bathroom for a long time. While that may be some of the responsibilities, youth leaders are not babysitters. More clarity was provided after receiving candid feedback on the way current volunteers viewed their roles.

Although Wheeler Avenue has a rich history of strong youth ministry and provides significant resources for events, it is important to move beyond an event-driven model to ensure that true discipleship is happening for the youth. Youth leaders have the perfect opportunity to make a difference and disciple the youth. However, although the youth leaders have the perfect opportunity to disciple the youth, the leaders are not equipped to meet the youth to affect the much-needed change. Being a youth leader is about being able to connect with the youth on their level and help them grow as a Christian. While so many people are eager to volunteer and to become youth leaders, some of the volunteers are not trained to work with the youth. By enforcing proper training, leaders can move effectively in their calling. Reaching youth is taking the time to learn the youth's language to rightly divide the scripture for them to understand. It is then followed up with living the word of God before them, so they know how to properly

activate the true application of their experience. Wheeler Avenue has facilitated the perfect opportunity to cultivate engagement, and discipleship and assist youth in feeling connected to ministry. A safe place to go is a great place to grow! Wheeler has been that for so many young people!

Even with the effectiveness of the Youth Church, there are still some that remain disengaged and disconnected from the ministries. The question remains, what more can be done to reach those who are having trouble connecting? I found the answer to be to keep going. If the youth leaders are equipped to disciple the youth, then youth leaders have the perfect opportunity to make a difference and disciple the youth. For this reason, the transformational youth leadership model for youth ministry focuses on leaders being equipped to build relationships with the youth to better disciple and connect with them. It is a challenge. However, to address this challenge, churches must equip leaders to cultivate engagement, discipleship, and connection in youth ministry. Showing up as a youth leader is not enough to help engage, disciple, and connect. Leaders must be intentional with their time with the youth. Communication must be key to effectively lead the youth. As the growth of the youth ministry at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church has been seen throughout its history, there is still more work to be done. It has not only been important to me, but to the entire church leadership. It is because of this that growth continues, and the next generation is being discipled.

The Wheeler Avenue leaders must be also committed to staying aware of the happenings of modern-day life and how it affects the youth they are ministering to. The youth are faced with daily challenges, and I would argue that some of the issues the youth face today are different from what their parents face. The youth deal with peer pressure,

comparison, social media, and identity crises. Youth need leaders who can help them navigate the complex challenges they face. Youth ministry is more than having the youth sit in a space while the adults are in worship. But youth ministry is for our young people to feel safe where they can encounter God in their way. Youth ministry should be a way for the youth to experience for themselves and to be able to see God even amid social media, technological changes, peer pressure, identity crises, and more. Having a youth ministry that speaks to life's challenges is so vital. Knowing their resources can help young people feel better about building a relationship with God. They need leaders who are biblically trained to address the real struggles while helping them understand their Creator. Youth have questions and although leaders may not have all the answers, every youth leader needs to know the basics. This aids in ensuring the youth's spiritual maturity and amplifies the way they move in faith. If the youth are going to be engaged, discipled, and connected in youth ministry, leaders are required to be equipped to volunteer and committed to serving. It all starts with the leaders of the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church.

Methodology

The purpose of this project was to equip leaders to cultivate engagement, discipleship, and connection in youth ministry. The goal of this work has been to help the leaders committed to working with the youth at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church understand the importance of being properly trained to lead youth ministry. This project helped the leaders understand that they were not baby sisters but called by God to help reach the next generation and grow their relationship with God by cultivating

engagement, discipleship, and connection with the youth. The end is that it would increase the knowledge of the leader to better understand the young people they get the chance to serve.

For this project, I decided to apply a combination of qualitative methods, such as pre-and post-surveys, interviews, and writing reflections. Utilizing these methods allowed me the opportunity to get a better understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences and offered detailed data that would be impossible to capture using quantitative methods and measures alone. The goal was to get a better understanding of the leaders' perspective on spiritual growth and their aspect of engagement in youth ministry and working with the youth. Using these qualitative methods allowed me to effectively grasp experiences, and their reflections on how youth connect with leaders within youth ministry.

The pre-and post-surveys played an essential role in providing a way to notice changes in the participants' perspective about their role in youth ministry, who they are as leaders, and their spiritual growth. It captures changes in the leader's perspective about the youth that they serve and their knowledge of the youth. By giving the pre-and post-surveys, I compared the results before and after and measured shifts in understanding and excitement for youth ministry and engagement, discipleship, and connection with the youth. These before and after surveys allowed for a better understanding of the rest of the methods that were used.

Another method used was interviews. The interviews allowed me to get a better understanding of the passionate leaders involved in youth ministry. Engaging in conversations with the leaders presented the chance to explore their success, challenges,

and enthusiasm. Motives on why they wanted to work with the youth, and their view on what discipleship is to them, as well as leadership development. The interviews helped to reveal how the leaders' cultivated connections within the youth ministry and if the connection was effective. Doing the interviews encourages the participants to be honest about the youth ministry, themselves as leaders, and the reason why they believed they were called to youth and youth ministry. These interviews also allowed them to be honest about what needs to happen to ensure excellence within themselves and the Youth Pastor. These were transparent conversations that caused the leaders to feel more included in the youth ministry and vision of the Youth Pastor. The participants expressed that their participation in youth ministry allowed them to grow as a Christian and a leader not just at church but in their professions as well. Serving in youth ministry gave them purpose and a heart for the next generation.

The last method that was used was journaling or writing reflections. Writing reflections was essential for this project. Each participant had the opportunity to document their spiritual journeys. With the written reflections, the leaders were able to record their personal experiences, and ongoing and reflective data were captured as well. The journaling method offered a more introspective perspective for the leaders. The leaders documented their emotional responses and the changes in their mentality as youth leaders and not simply just volunteers. By examining the journals, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of how the participants grew mentally and spiritually within the youth ministry as leaders.

The decision to use these qualitative methods was key to gaining a deeper understanding of the leaders and their experiences within the youth ministry. Youth

ministry is not just about fun and keeping young people busy with programs and events. Rather than always focusing on events or programs, using these methods allowed me to see how leaders felt about youth ministry, and the leaders created a safe space for the youth to experience God and their peers. This approach exposes how well the leaders engage with the youth they are leading. These methods required the participants to understand their role and how important they are to the growth and future of the youth they believe are called to not just serve by impact but by making a difference in the lives of young people.

The youth ministry is not just something to do for leaders who believe they are or will be great parents. The youth need leaders who are intentional in their methods to engage, disciple, and connect with the youth. Youth ministry is not just for programming and playing but to influence the youth and give them the foundation of the faith, and that starts with a shift in the leadership perspective on youth ministry and their ability to lead and impact the youth to keep them engaged so that they can grow and gain a closer relationship with God and their peers. These qualitative methods were not only about getting statistics but getting the leaders to realize how important they are to young people and their spiritual growth.

By using the chosen methods, I gained more clarity on what makes the youth ministry effective. Also, it provided more effective ways to promote engagement, discipleship, and engagement for the youth. The information captured allowed the leaders to be open to creating a more impactful environment for the youth for their spiritual development. Finally, combining these qualitative methods provided a more comprehensive understanding of youth ministry and leaders who work with the youth.

What was discovered opened the eyes of the ministry leaders that spiritual growth goes beyond eating and planning events but making sure each leader is equipped to help the youth grow spiritually and remain connected not only to the local church but also to their faith. The goal is to make a lifelong impact and the youth that are currently in youth ministry will also know how to cultivate a safe space for engagement, discipleship, and connection for the future generations to come.

One of the downsides of qualitative methods is the time spent collecting and examining the data. Time was well spent on the participants. When time is taken away from participants with full-time jobs or other duties, some participants may not contribute the time it takes to think through and answer the interview or pre-and post-survey questions. When that happens, this can limit the number of participants, placing limitations on the project. Some of the participants expressed they wished they had more time than the six weeks allotted.

Another challenge that may have presented itself was the participants' own bias. They were asked to be transparent, but some participants could have given answers that they believed the interviewer wanted to hear to maintain their position in the youth ministry. Not all the participants were able to articulate as well as other participants. However, the benefits of the methods outweigh the challenges.

Implementation

We began a pre-survey for all the youth participants for the focus group at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. The purpose of the pre-survey was to collect the data and to make sure all the participants and the presenter understood the purpose of the

project and focus group. The pre-survey was helpful for the focus group because it gave the presenter a clear understanding of where each participant was and their perspective of the youth ministry along with their role with the youth. By allowing the participants to complete the pre-survey before the sessions, each person was able to know what to expect for each session and that allowed for intentional interaction between the presenter and the participants.

The purpose of the focus group was to ensure that each youth leader understood how important they are to the youth ministry at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. Also, it explained how the six-week sessions should empower the youth leaders to engage, disciple, and connect with the youth. The training was aimed at encouraging the leaders who have been called to work with the youth but need to be equipped to properly lead in the youth ministry. Wheeler Avenue's mission is to minister to the total person. We believe in a holistic approach. Having a clear understanding of the context of Wheeler, I wanted to make sure that each focus group member was geared towards impacting and empowering the leader and those they minister to.

In each session, the participants were able to be transparent about their journey as youth leaders. They asked questions, which led to an open discussion between participants and presenters. The goal was not to "preach" or to tell them what to do but to provide resources for each participant to have and use to grow individually and as a leader in the youth ministry. The questions that were asked allowed each leader to think about their role as a leader and also what could be done to ensure engagement, discipleship, and connection in the youth ministry. These sessions lasted an hour. Within that hour, leaders were impacted and empowered to not only be present but to be

intentional in making a difference. We met every Wednesday, and all the participants were aware that the data collected would be used beyond the academic setting through journal responses, and post-surveys. Each participant agreed to the arrangements and was excited for the opportunity to grow and get better as a leader in the Wheeler Avenue youth ministry.

One important point that was discussed was the disconnect between leaders and the youth. We discussed how leaders must understand the youth and how the youth should understand the leaders. Participants explained how they often felt the youth does not listen and how they had a hard time connecting. Therefore, the youth seemed as if they were misunderstood and did not give their full attention and participation. The youth leaders struggled to capture the attention of the youth and consequently, the youth were present but disengaged. Because of the disconnect, the youth leaders did not feel trusted, and that gap affected the overall participation and openness within the youth ministry.

We discussed how COVID-19 had a major impact on the youth and caused them to learn how to live in isolation. While youth ministry should be a community, most youth are present but are uncomfortable with connecting with the leaders or their peers. The youth were not able to attend school, social events, and everything that allowed them to fellowship with one another. As the leaders tried to minister to the youth during that time, Zoom was not doing the job for the young people to connect. The shift to digital ministry created challenges for the leaders to connect with the youth. This ultimately led some youth to feel isolated and disengaged from the church and the church community. This conversation allowed for the intentionality of each session to cultivate engagement, discipleship, and connection with youth ministry.

Focus Group Session One included a discussion on understanding today's youth. At the beginning of the session, the participants had the chance to talk about that one leader who made an impact on them. One thing the participants had in common was that the person who made an impact on them was not a preacher or pastor. They discovered that to make an impact on the youth, they must stop looking for the Youth Pastor to make a difference and be serious and intentional about being that positive person when they encounter the youth. After that conversation, we discussed the importance of understanding today's youth. The leaders were reminded that they are leading a new generation, and the methods worked in the past are no longer sufficient for our youth today. The participants learned that a lot has changed, and an example was used about young people as a gift. The gift is the same, but the wrapping may be different. The problem that was presented to the leaders was when we try to identify people by their wrappings and not their gifts, it is easy to misunderstand people.

In session one, the point was made that respect is earned and not given. The generation that the leaders now must lead demands respect, versus when the leaders were young, respect was given out of fear of the adult. It is essential for the youth today to be authentic and not feel the need to be like their mentor. Participants were reminded that to understand the youth of today, transparency is not an option, but a strong resource. When the leaders are open to honesty, the youth will be open more because they will feel safe enough to do so. Creating a safe space is key to getting to know the youth. It is important to provide a space that is inclusive where the youth can feel safe enough to be who they are and feel comfortable being fully connected to the ministry. Multiple participants asked why we must take a different approach if the leaders are the superior and the youth

are the subordinates. The response to that answer was that no generation is the same, and what worked then will push the new generation away. The example was used about technology. At one point, technology was seen as the 'devil' but now, with today's youth, technology can be used to disciple them differently. The leaders were challenged with their perspectives on technology and social media. They were empowered to be progressive with the tools that can be used to cultivate engagement, discipleship, and connection. The youth watched reels and TikTok videos, and the leaders were asked, how often do we? Try to connect with the youth on the platforms that have their attention. While social media seems like a negative tool to use, it is an amazing tool to help leaders understand how to serve the present age. For example, while many people check their emails, the youth who are served check their text messages. Leaders were asked how often they try to make a difference by loving some of the resources and tools the youth love. Being able to understand youth helps the leaders know how to properly disciple the youth. Participants were given time to share their perspectives and opinions about the new generation versus the previous generations and how not understanding what makes each generation different affects having a thriving youth ministry. The group had a chance to answer various questions relative to understanding today's youth.

Focus Group Session Two included effective communication with youth. Session Two began with a recap of session one. We discussed what changed in their perspective after having some time to think about the conversation. They had some time to reflect on their approach to leadership and what they believed they could do better to be effective leaders. After reflecting and reviewing, we discussed their communication style and whether it encourages or discourages youth participation and openness. The participants

discussed how tone and body language matter. The leaders were made aware that they must be mindful that they are not in the youth ministry to be the parents when the youth parents are not around. To make a difference and mentor the next generation, this approach must always be heavily considered! Shaping the minds of youth and young adults cannot be accomplished with yelling, screaming, and being aggressive. Being rough with the youth will not make them want to remain connected. When young people are left feeling mentally and spiritually disconnected, it is hard to make them disciples.

I talked about the importance of having corrections with rapport and being open to understanding their perspective. In Session Two, the participants discussed the challenges of communicating with the youth because they did not know how to be open and honest with "kids!" The participants learned the importance of allowing openness and honesty with the youth to go both ways. However, the leaders must set an example. Session Two challenged the leaders to communicate with the youth without being judgmental. When the youth feel judged, they begin to get defensive, and that causes them to be disengaged. Leading with love and encouragement will prevent them from feeling condemned and set the tone for comfortable communication. Effective communication is creating a culture where the youth can feel safe to converse with the leader, and through those conversations, they will feel supported and will be open to correction so they can learn from their mistakes and continue to grow in grace.

To end this session, we played a game. I placed different words, some they were familiar with and some unfamiliar with. I used these words to effectively communicate my intent behind ensuring that they understood what was being shared. For example, roasting means to cook, but in the culture, roasting means to talk about someone. The

same goes for heat, flame, and fire. They all mean something different to a different generation. The leaders had to tell what the word meant, and I asked someone from Generation Z if they used the word the same. Most of the leaders knew the word but were not updated on the meaning. After the game, the leaders understood that sometimes the youth are disconnected, disengaged, and not discipled, because of the lack of communication between the leader and youth. After the game, the group was asked questions related to effective communication with the youth.

Focus Group Session Three began discussing the strategies that could be used to mentor young people throughout their spiritual journey, ensuring they understand the core principles of our faith. After that discussion, we talked about what it means to create a safe space for the youth to feel free to engage and get involved in the youth ministry. We had an open discussion about what is safe space, and each participant viewed safe space differently. After each leader expressed their opinion on safe space, we further discussed the meaning of safe space and explored the best approach to creating a safe space for the youth. We concluded that for the youth to not just be present but to participate. Essentially, they needed a space where they were respected, valued, and accepted. The leaders understood that youth ministry was not about having a space to hold events for the youth or to learn the books of the Bible but a safe space they could call home away from home. After hard days at school and maybe even home, they needed a space to decompress and for them to feel the love of God. This allowed leaders to understand their priority was to create a space every time they encountered youth.

Creating a safe space also involves addressing the challenges the youth face. The leaders felt as if they were not empathetic enough and after Session Three, they felt

compelled to understand the pressures the youth face but do not talk about. Leaders expressed how they wanted to become more of a listener to the youth than a therapist. Session Three helped participants get another perspective on how they can raise their children. A safe space in church is needed for the development of the youth. We ended Session Three by making a solid commitment to support the youth intentionally on their faith journey.

Focus Group Session Four began with a discussion about the ways the voices and talents of our youth can be incorporated into our worship services and discipleship programs. At Wheeler, we have a youth church twice a month, but only the same participation. We found that it is typically children of the youth leaders. The goal is to get everyone to participate. We then engaged in a discussion about providing a chance for the youth to partner together to plan what they would like to do in the service and have training. However, we had to dive a bit deeper into the discussion on the perspective of why they need to participate. A few participants stated they believed we as leaders should make the youth participate even if they did not want to. To end that discussion, we all agreed on allowing the youth the opportunity to volunteer and to teach them why we worship. Then, for Session Four, we discussed strategies to keep them engaged. Normally, we have the same model as most services. This usually includes singing and preaching. After diving deeper into our discussion of the lack of engagement, we thought it would be better to have breakout sessions instead of traditional preaching. There was an open discussion about interactive learning and using hands-on activities for them to be more engaged. We also talked about creating real-life discussions and being willing to listen to the youth. Most of the leaders agreed with this.

Youth should learn from adults, but I taught them how to listen and allow the youth to discuss their challenges, and they will be a bit more curious. Those scriptures and discussions can be had about what the Bible says about their situation. We discovered that the youth talk more when asked questions. It is easier for them to wrestle out loud when the speaker asks the youth questions rather than the traditional preaching. The good news is youth worship is only twice a month, and on the other two Sundays, they experience traditional church. We all agreed on the importance of a good balance. To end Session Four, we discussed why the youth may not be engaged and after coming up with strategies, we realized that some of the stuff we do in church is outdated and updates needed to be made to cultivate engagement, connection, and discipleship.

Focus Group Session Five began with an open discussion about ways we should actively seek feedback from youth and how we implement our approach. We explored ideas such as quarterly surveys, small group reflections, a youth leadership board, and open discussions during youth church. One of the concerns presented was youth possibly disliking tradition. Each participant had a chance to give their perspective, but we all ended the discussion agreeing that we must be open to feedback to create a space that young people would want to enter. After that discussion ended, we talked about ways we can effectively use digital media and technology to connect with youth and support their journey as disciples. The leaders were challenged to come out of their comfort zone. Youth love social media like Instagram, TikTok, and more. We discussed how they are always making dance videos and how often they use social media to connect with their peers. The leaders decided that it would be fun to post short videos with impactful messages, scriptures, and funny videos inviting young people to church. The leaders were

concerned that gimmicks were being used to disciple the youth. However, after the session, each leader felt inspired to use media to minister to the youth. Participants agreed that a virtual Bible study or something to capture the attention of the youth would be key to using what the youth love to disciple the youth. The group was asked various questions on digital media and connecting with youth through social media.

Focus Group Session Six was the final session of the focus groups at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. In this final session, the participants took the post-survey, and we had an open discussion about the training. Each participant gave their perspective on youth ministry and if they felt empowered after the six weeks. The post-survey for the focus group gave me a deeper understanding of how the six weeks either helped the participants or did not help. I was also aware of their perspective about themselves as leaders. We discussed that it is better to consider leaders and not volunteers. Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church is accustomed to using the word volunteer, but after six weeks, the leaders explained how a change in the language motivated them to take responsibility as leaders and empowered them to be more intentional every time they encountered the youth. This was the end of the focus group.

Summary of Learning

The following information is the summation of data collected from the six-week focus group sessions at the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. Various sources were used to gather the necessary data. These sources include a focus group discussion, journal responses, and pre- and post-session surveys. The participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences during each session and provide transparent answers. From there, all

responses were grouped based on common themes related to each question presented to the participants. I was pleased to see how willing each participant was to share their input and provide new ideas we should consider to accomplish our goal for real change.

Pre-Surveys

Pre and post-surveys were created to measure the perspective and skill of the participants throughout the six-week project. The goal was to see if their perspective on youth ministry and their role in youth ministry would change after the six-week focus group. The pre-survey helped establish a baseline for the participants. I truly found each participant's response to be influential in understanding where the leaders were mentally and where more growth was needed. The post-survey helped measure the growth of the participants based on what was taught and discussed in the six-week project. The post-survey allowed me to see which leaders improved and changed their perspective or maintained the same perspective at the end of six weeks. Both assigned surveys inspired participants to engage in the goal of change and align with the agenda to uncover better ways to connect with the youth. By being intentional in surveying the people in the ministry, we can continue to brainstorm more effective ways to serve our youth and teach them how to commit to true discipleship.

We found the metrics to be remarkably interesting. We presented participants with five questions during the pre-survey session. The first question was what initially inspired you to volunteer with youth, and does that motivation still drive you today? Five out of the eleven responses revealed that they were inspired to make a positive influence and impact on youth. 45.5% of the group answered that they were motivated to make an

impact on the youth at Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church. Three out of the eleven (27.3%), responded that the Holy Spirit led them to volunteer with the youth ministry and that volunteering was their spiritual calling. Four out of eleven (36.4%), responded by stating that service and honoring God initially inspired them to volunteer with the youth. Two out of the eleven (18.2 %), answered that personal growth in faith initially inspired them to volunteer because they wanted the youth to grow as well.

I found the shift in the answers from pre-survey to post-survey to be eye-opening. Some of the participants' answers to the original questions slightly increased by 54%. The one that stood out the most was stating that making a difference in the youth's lives is important and very much needed. Three out of eleven participants said the Holy Spirit moved them to volunteer. In the post-survey, two out of eleven mentioned that honoring God and service to God motivated them to volunteer. For the pre-survey answers, two out of eleven responded that it was because of personal growth after the project.

We noticed a decrease after the project. Few participants responded to the Holy Spirit or spiritual calling, listing honoring God and service to God as their primary motivation. During the six weeks, we talked about the importance of knowing their motivations and how to differentiate the practical and relational reasons resulting in their volunteering. Having a positive influence and impact on the youth remained the largest reason they decided to volunteer with the Wheeler Avenue Youth Ministry. The participants were motivated after the six-week project to be effective in the lives of young people. While motivation increased, spiritual calling decreased. The participants learned that their motivations must be practical and relations rather than spiritual or self-driven

motivations only. The six-week project opened their eyes to be more intentional about creating a space for engagement, discipleship, and connection in the youth ministry.

Question two for the pre-survey was, what do you think influences the effectiveness of the youth ministry? The responses for all eleven participants were relevant to content, peer pressure, understanding of the youth's needs, and involved parents. However, after the six-week project, peer pressure and parents not being involved increased. Leadership became more important for the post-survey. After the six-week project, the participants understood the importance of using the interactive approach to remain effective in the youth ministry as leaders.

Question three was, how do you view discipleship within our youth ministry? What areas do you think we could be more improved to enhance the spiritual growth of our youth? Eleven participants responded to the pre-survey. Three out of eleven (27%), responded by stating that understanding and teaching discipleship in a way the youth can understand. Only 1 (9.1%) responded that they were uncertain about discipleship and what discipleship means in youth ministry.

However, based on the responses from the participants, they did not have a clear understanding of the discipleship. Two out of eleven (18.2%) mentioned that discipleship means to be interactive and have fun methods to teach the youth about being a disciple and teaching discipleship. 18.2 % responded that the youth need more breakout sessions and small groups to connect more with the youth, and therefore, the youth can become disciples. One person (9.1%), stated that to make disciples in youth ministry, relationships must grow stronger, and the youth must build relationships in the ministry.

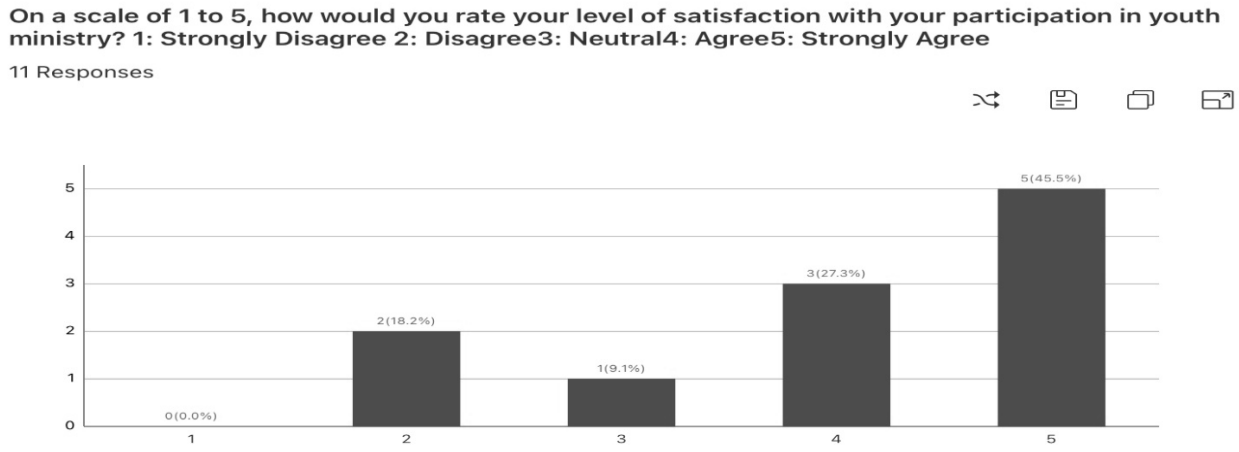
Lastly, 9.1% responded by saying discipleship programs and mentorships. Overall, the pre-survey analytics are 27% focused on understanding and teaching discipleship in a way for the youth to grasp. 18.2 % stated their uncertainty about discipleship, and 9.1% mentioned how important it is to talk about relevant issues and have leaders who build relationships between the leaders and youth. After the participants finished the six-week project and took the post-survey, there was a slight change in the participants' responses. Structure and programs for the youth increased from 9.1% to 27.3%. Interactive activities that will help the youth build relations increased from 18.2% to 27.3%. Leaders making sure to spend intentional time increased from 9.1 % to 18.2% and being relevant about real-life issues remained the same from pre-and post-survey. Based on this data, the participants believe that the youth need structure and relationships to build disciples and create an effective discipleship program for the youth.

Question four was how do you view your role? Would you identify more as a supportive figure, babysitter, or a leader guiding the youth? Four responses (36.4%) in total said they are supportive figures in the youth ministry. A supportive figure is present to support any way they are needed. Three responses (27.3%) in total view their role as a babysitter. We discussed that babysitters are those who are not intentional about making a difference but are present to watch the youth until their parents are available for pick up. 27.3% also responded that they see themselves as a leader.

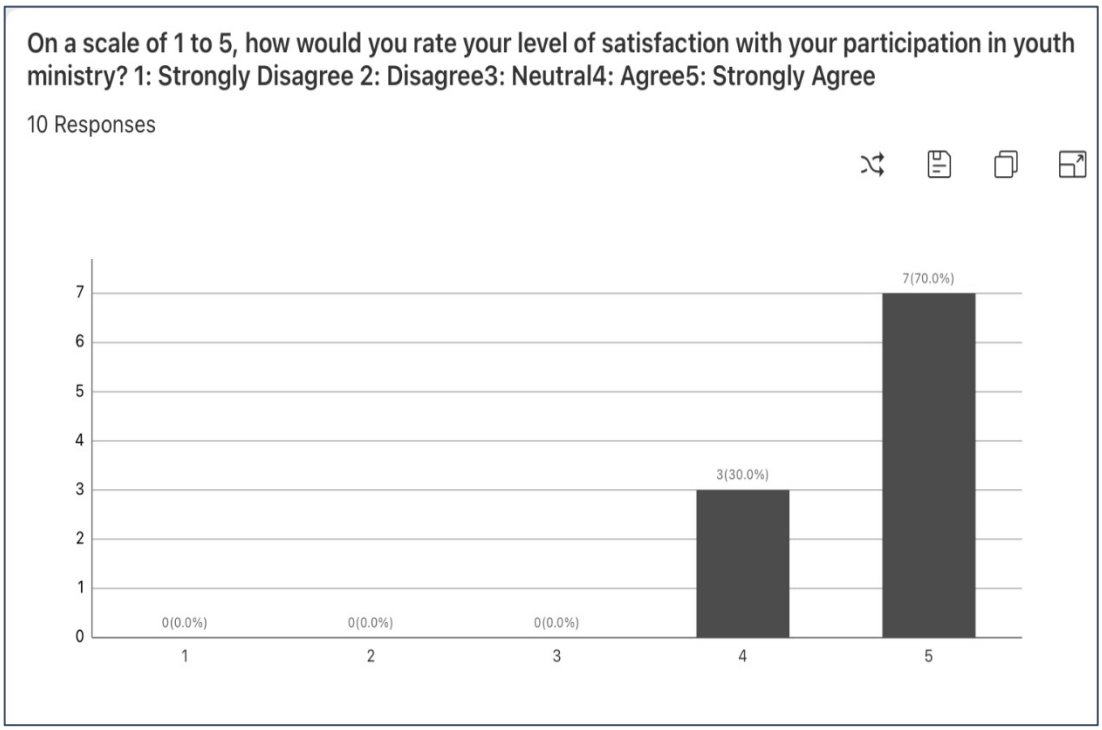
A leader is a person who sets an example and leads by example. 9.1 % acknowledged that they see themselves in multiple roles. After the six-week training, the post-survey shows there was an increase in the participants seeing themselves as leaders and a decrease in participants seeing themselves as babysitters and a supportive role. The

six-week training was effective. The participants are confident in who they are as leaders and are more intentional about leading the youth and helping them grow and not just babysitting and doing what the youth pastor asks but making sure they are building relationships with the youth they serve.

Question five from the pre-survey session was asked how you would rate your level of satisfaction with your participation in youth ministry? The rating scale was set from one to five. One participant provided a rating of 1. 18.2% responded with a rating of two (2 people). 9.1% responded with a three on the rating scale. 27.3 (1 person) responded with a four on a scale of one to five. 45.5% (3 people) answered with five on a scale of one to five. (5 people). The graph is listed below.



We noticed a change in the data after six weeks. The data changed because the participants felt empowered and gained a better understanding of the purpose of effective leadership in youth ministry. Due to one participant getting sick, only ten responded, but the changes increased after the training. The results are listed in the graph below.



Conclusion

The focus group used for this research can be considered an overall success. The most impactful part of the project was the open discussion. The participants expressed their perspectives about the youth ministry at Wheeler Avenue and where they were spiritual. The six-week project was very transformative for all the leaders, including me. This experience encouraged growth as leaders and allowed them to understand the importance of being intentional in their calling. It also pushed them to dig deeper into finding innovative ways to cultivate the youth. After the training, the leaders understood that they were more than volunteers but changemakers. Although Wheeler thrives because the church has phenomenal volunteers, the volunteers in youth ministry must see themselves as leaders. The word volunteer limits what they believe about their capabilities. They expressed that before the training, they depended on the youth pastor to

do everything, and their role was to be present. However, engaging in this training helped them view themselves as leaders and understand they have the power to impact the youth as well. The training served as a mirror, showing them areas that needed improvement but also revealing the various possibilities of change. We needed them to realize they were not babysitters but difference-makers. They also have a better understanding of discipleship and the importance of spending time with the youth to cultivate engagement, discipleship, and connection in youth ministry. The growth can be attributed to the pre- and-post-surveys. Before the training, the participants expressed that they served in youth ministry because they wanted to honor God and make sure they served their church. After the sessions, they realized that their motives were good, but in a way, selfish because it was not about the youth and ensuring the youth were being disciples. They acknowledged how much training was needed to expose them to their weaknesses and how unintentional they were while serving the youth. The participants' mindset shifted and caused the participants to take a deeper look at how important it is for the leaders to set the example for the church to have a thriving youth ministry. In one of the sessions, one participant stated that most churches do not have the budget to have an effective youth ministry, but after the six-week sessions, that participants acknowledged that it is not about the money, although money is needed, it is about intentionality. Without intentional leaders, the youth will not participate and without participation, it is hard to make disciples.

While the six-week training was effective, there are areas I would like to improve if I were to repeat the study. I would ask better pre- and post-survey questions. The questions that were asked were good, but I wanted the participants to go even deeper with their thoughts. The choice to shift from the traditional lecture model to open discussion

was proven to be beneficial. The participants wanted to linger on certain subjects. However, due to limited time, they did not get the chance to go as deep as they wanted to go in the sessions. This encouraged me to consider extending the length of the sessions. It also provoked the thought of having eight-week sessions versus six-week sessions. I believe the succession of the six-week training empowered the leaders to make a difference every time they meet with the youth to ensure the youth feel safe. The goal is to also facilitate a safe space where they can come to worship without feeling judged or comparing themselves to their peers. Training created an approach that equips leaders to engage, disciple, and connect with the youth by creating a safe space that will allow the youth to grow. The six-week training shifted the minds of the participants and allowed them to be more enthusiastic about their youth and their futures. Overall, the project allowed the leaders to gain a deeper relationship with others. I am hoping this will further fuel their motivation to go even higher in their efforts and experience God in a new way!

The project revealed the importance of building a healthy relationship between leaders and the youth they are assigned to minister to. When there is no sense of relationships, it tends to close the door to trust. Youth ministry extends beyond Sunday morning, but discipleship happens when relations are built and nurtured. The leaders understand that youth ministry is essential for every church to take the time to cultivate. Leaders are necessary for all areas of life. Engaging with youth is crucial because it empowers them to develop vital life skills, build self-esteem, contribute meaningfully to their communities, and influence decisions that directly affect them, ultimately shaping a better future by providing a platform for their unique perspectives and ideas to be heard and considered; it also benefits society by fostering a sense of civic responsibility and

positive social change. Furthermore, youth engagement creates room for them to grow by living positive, fulfilling, and instructive experiences, giving meaning to life. To model their identity by mixing with significant adults and peers, could be a winning combination for their development.

Our goal is to show the next generation they are very important to God and serve a great purpose in the Kingdom of God. We want them to understand that their God-given light is powerful and can be influential in society. Adolescence is a key window when young people are figuring out who they are, trying to make meaning of the world around them, and finding a sense of purpose. As we think about securing our next generation of believers, we must aim to see the church as a safe place again. It is a great time to engage youth and provide them with opportunities to develop spiritually along with other areas. Unfortunately, the church is not their only influence. They are swayed by social media, global issues, such as healthcare, poverty, human rights, inequalities, and how it defines their abilities. This can shape their worldviews and affect their attitudes and thoughts. So how do we make God the center of their lives and at the forefront of their agendas? How do we get the youth to see their potential? Youth are effective change-makers if given proper rights to participate. The processes of engagement and meaningful talks equip them with a better connection to their voices, which will eventually help them become effective leaders.

To understand the change the youth are looking for, leaders must also be aware of the barriers they face. In church, youth come from different walks of life. Many young people are living in low-income areas few opportunities are available for them to participate in and approach decision-making. The lack of willingness to attend traditional

participation activities is because the topics are not attractive and unrelatable. They may view the participation process as long and boring. The heightened anxiety about race and gender inequalities is also at the center of their frustrations as well. The expanded accessibility to information and the lack of appropriate engagement on the platforms are blocking their way to participation. The question continues to be, how do we connect with them on their level while also remaining true to the word of God?

Youth engagement not only benefits young people, but it also benefits the church and its leaders. Meaningfully engaging youth helps the church to better understand how to work with young people and improve the quality and relevance of their presence in the church. The Annie E. Casey Foundation once said, "It's really important to support and collaborate with young people, who are the experts in their own lives."[1]

They have their thoughts, opinions, and ideas! Our goal is to create a space of trust for them to share and cultivate them for the glory of God. To truly prioritize youth engagement, we must recognize young people as capable partners in ministry instead of service-goers. This challenges leaders to empower youth to lead discussions about their futures, while also providing the support they need to achieve their goals of developing into true disciples.

Youth development prepares young people to meet the challenges within their personal lives and spiritual warfare to achieve their full potential. We can promote this through relatable activities and experiences that help youth develop social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies. Youth leadership is part of the youth development process and supports the young person in developing the ability to analyze

[1] Annie E. Casey Foundation, "What Children and Young People Need to Thrive," Annie E. Casey Foundation, https://www.aecf.org/resources/what-young-people-need-to-thrive.

their strengths and weaknesses, set personal, spiritual, and career goals, and develop self-esteem, confidence, motivation, and ability to carry them out. Our goal as leaders is to lead them in a way where they can see themselves and their potential through the word of God. This is important because young followers can be developed into young leaders of a new generation.

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